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THE LIGHTS O' GOTHAM; OR, THE GILDED VILLAIN.

BY RALPH ROYAL.



THE MURDERER LOOKED UP, AND THERE WAS A MUTUAL RECOGNITION. "TOM THE TOPER!" HE EJACULATED, WITH AN OATH.

THE LIGHTS O' GOTHAM; OR, The Gilded Villain.

By RALPH ROYAL.

CHAPTER I.

MISERY'S ABODE.

In a room of one of the most tumble down tenement-houses in New York city, lay a woman dying of consumption, the result of want, misery, and privation.

It was a bitterly cold December day, about sixteen years ago, and the sleet and snow were driven by the wintry blasts without through the broken panes into the fireless, cheerless, destitute room, and fell in wet, icy flakes over the dying woman; over her husband sitting on a low stool at her side, with his face buried in his hands, the picture of misery and despair; and over their child, a wee-bit of a girl, two years of age, wan and pinched in face, yet happy, because ignorant, and laughing with childish glee, as, nestling on her mother's breast, she stretched out her tiny hands to catch the snow-flakes as they fell.

A bell from some tower in the vicinity struck the hour of five.

At the sound the dying woman stirred uneasily, and opened her eyes, which until then she had kept closed, and barely distinguishing her husband's outlines in the darkness that was creeping into the room, she huskily muttered:

"John!"

The husband raised his face, hardly less white and pallid than that of his wife, and it could be seen that he was still young, scarcely more than thirty years of age, and, in a dull voice, replied:

"What is it, Emily?"

"It is five o'clock, and the doctor hasn't come."

"He won't, then. He thinks it's useless, I suppose; and, besides, we owe him too much money already."

He loved his wife, this man, but, though she was dying, no word of affection or endearment escaped his lips—so much does misery freeze the expression of love, even if it does not kill the sentiment itself.

Emily Baxter sighed, and murmured:

"No matter; it will soon be over. It is very dark here, John."

"I can't help it, Emily; our last candle is gone."

The child, probably frightened at the darkness, began to cry.

"Poor little Emily!" exclaimed the mother, stretching out her wan and wasted arms and clasping her. "She is hungry. Isn't there a bit of bread in the house?"

John Baxter got up from his stool, and, in his dull, apathetic manner, groped his way to the mantel-piece, returning with a crust of stale bread, which he handed to the child.

"It is the last," he said, as he gave it to her.

The child eagerly grabbed it, and her crunching on it was the only sound which disturbed the stillness of that home of misery which reigned for the next five minutes.

At the end of that time the woman said:

"Do you know what I have been thinking about, John?"

"What?" he asked from his stool, on which he had again drearily sank.

"That to-day is the anniversary of our marriage."

"It is true. We were married three years ago."

"We were happy then, were we not?" she dreamily continued. "I was a book-folder; you were setting type in the same publishing house. We loved each other—we love each other yet, do we not?"

The man uttered a groan, and the tears trickled down between his fingers, which he had clasped over his face.

"Yes, yes, we love each other yet," he huskily exclaimed. "Heaven knows, Emily, I have tried to do my duty toward you. The first year all went well; then the child came, and our employer failed in business. I was thrown out of employment just at the time I needed it the most. I have tried—oh, how I tried!—to find work elsewhere, but in vain. The hard times, places all filled—why repeat all the rebuffs I met with? When I did get work for a short time, my new employer was a cheat, a rogue, a swindler. He owes me to-day more money than we would need for our present necessities. But he does business in his wife's name, and rides in his coach, while his poor, miserable dupes are starving to death as we are. It is enough to drive one to crime, or to suicide!"

He repeated the last word two or three times, but in so low a tone that his wife did not hear him.

"Do not talk so bitterly, John," she said, as she made room at her side for the child, which, having eaten its bread, had fallen asleep in her arms. "I do not reproach you; I know it is not your fault. I might have helped you, but I have been sickly since our child was born. It is a terrible burden to a man to have a sick wife."

"You are an angel, Emily!" he hastily replied, stooping forward and kissing her on the forehead. "What you have suffered and endured, and uncomplainingly, too, no woman on earth has gone through. And it is that which puts the iron in my soul, to think that I, young, sound, and healthy, and willing to work, can, in this great city of New York, find nothing to do, that I am reduced to the condition of a tramp."

He lowered his voice, and again the word "suicide" escaped his lips in a whisper.

A sudden fit of coughing seized his wife. The hacking sound cut his heart as with a knife; he indistinctly saw her take up a handful of straw and wipe her lips with it. He knew it was blood—her heart's blood—she was wiping from her lips.

He could stand it no longer.

He rose to his feet; a wild, almost maniacal light came into his eyes. He went toward the door. His wife heard him moving.

"Where are you going?" she asked, gasping with the exhaustion in which the fit of coughing had left her.

"I am going for the physician," he huskily answered; adding to himself, "the great physician who heals all earthly pains."

He left the room, closing the door behind him.

A light had been placed in the entry of the ground floor, and its flickering beams, struggling up the five intervening stories, faintly illumined the landing on which he was standing.

"Why not here?" he muttered; "it is as good a place as any." He grasped the wooden railing which ran along the edge of the landing with both his hands, and shook it firmly to test its strength.

"It will hold," he muttered.

He bent over the railing and glanced down to the floor beneath.

"It's full twenty feet. It's enough."

He looked around him.

There was a heap of rubbish in one corner of the landing; among the heap he espied a rope. He clutched it eagerly, as if he had found a treasure.

The wild light in his eyes burned more intensely; his face, however, was now even paler than his dying wife's.

He heard her coughing again, and it spurred his actions.

He firmly tied one end of the rope to the railing, and twisted the other into a slip-noose.

Once more he leaned over the railing and looked down. The front door slammed, and some children who had been out playing in the snow came tramping in with noisy glee. He waited until they had disappeared in their rooms and the halls were deserted, and then he adjusted the noose around his neck.

"Hush-a-by baby."

It was his wife's voice. The child had awoke, and she was soothing it to sleep again. He heard its infantile cry, and then it was drowned in another, longer, more violent fit of coughing which seized his wife. These two sounds might have made another pause, but they only hurried him on in his dread design. His child's cry, in his ears, was the universal cry of the starving poor, his wife's cough the last rattle in the throat of dying misery; he wanted to escape from both, and the way was around his neck.

"Heaven protect them and forgive me!" he muttered, as he balanced himself for a moment on the railing previous to making the awful fatal drop.

At this instant the garret door, opposite the one in which his wife and child were lying, opened, and a torn and tattered tramp staggered out in a half-drunken condition. Though scarcely older than Baxter, hard and constant drinking had made a perfect wreck of him. In that neighborhood he was known as Tom, the toper, and that was all that people knew or cared to know about him.

Baxter saw him coming, and sought to drop and put an end to himself before he could be interfered with. But it was too late. Tom staggered heavily against him and clutched him by the leg which was hanging over the railing.

"Hello!" he hiccupped, "what the duse are you up to?"

"Let me go," exclaimed Baxter, energetically, but in a low tone, lest his wife should hear him.

He struggled to release the drunkard's hold on him, but the latter clung tenaciously to him.

"No, yer don't," continued the toper; "what yer astride of the railin' for? An' what's this rope a-doin' around yer neck. Yer want ter take a drop, do yer?"

While thus talking, the tramp had been fumbling with one hand in his pocket, and he now drew forth an open clasp-knife, with one cut of which he severed the rope.

"Can't you let me commit suicide if I want to?" ill-humoredly said Baxter. "If you had the troubles I had, you'd wish to die, too."

Tom steadied himself, and, in a more sober tone, replied:

"D'you think you're the only one's got trouble in this world? I've had mine, too. It was all about a girl. She went back on me, and then I took to drink. I've had thoughts of suicide, too; but I read a paragraph in a paper about it. It said that a suicide was a self-murderer, a coward who was afraid to live, a thief who robbed himself; that the vilest criminal had more pluck, and was worthy of more esteem than he, and so forth; I don't remember the whole of it now. No matter; that settled me. I determined ter show 'em I was brave enough ter live, and a jolly life I'm leadin', sleepin' all day, an' drunk all night. If the world's satisfied, I am. That's my philosophy, an' I guess you'll adopt it, too. I don't think you'll put your neck in a noose again. I'm off. Ta, ta, my boy!"

With a hoarse laugh he staggered off, and Baxter listened until he heard his heavy, uncertain steps die away on the floor below.

Then the would-be suicide, getting off the railing, took off the noose from his neck and flung it in a corner.

The wild, maniacal light disappeared from his eyes, and was replaced by a dangerous glitter.

"The vilest criminal is more worthy of esteem than the suicide," he muttered between his clenched teeth. "The paper says so. It is the verdict of society. Let it be so. The world has raised its hand against me, and having driven me to the point of suicide, mocks me and calls me a coward. I will show the world I am no coward. Henceforth my hand is raised against the world, and it alone is to blame for making me a monster."

With these words he pushed his hat down over his eyes, and, descending the staircase, left the house.

The dying woman, left alone on her pallet of straw, waited for her husband's return. She had heard a faint sound of a struggle, and a confused murmur of voices, but she had not been able to distinguish them through the closed door.

The hours passed on as she lay there, with her now sleeping child on her breast. She heard the bell sound the intervals of time, and it seemed to her that it was the church-bell calling her to her final home.

She vaguely wondered why her husband did not come back, if he would bring the doctor, and what the latter would say. But it was all far off and indistinct, as if it concerned some one else, and not her. Her child, too, seemed to be drifting away from her embrace, and twice or thrice she had to arouse herself with an effort to assure herself that it was in her arms.

What she was most sensible of was a feeling of warmth and repose, and absence of the hunger which had been gnawing at her stomach. The garret, too, seemed to be widening and spreading, until it apparently inclosed the whole earth; while the dingy rafters strangely faded away into the clear blue sky. She felt a buoyancy of body as well as spirit, as if angel hands were supporting her and bearing her up aloft.

How long she remained in this waking trance she did not know. She suddenly became conscious of the fact that her husband was in the room.

He was just lighting a candle, and as the first flickering flames fell on his face she noticed that it was ghastly pale, while a strange, uncanny light glittered in his eyes.

She laid aside her sleeping child, and, feebly raising herself on her elbow, exclaimed:

"You have come back, John?"

"Yes, Emily," he replied, in tones of triumph; "and see what I have brought. That which will buy you health again, bread and clothing for our child, shelter, and ease, and comfort, for us. Gold! gold! gold!"

He thrust his hands in his pockets as he spoke, and drew out a whole handful of the glittering coins, which he threw with reckless profusion at his wife's feet on the bed.

She uttered a shriek which rang through the house.

Then, with a sudden, new-born energy, she rose up.

"Gold!" she screamed. "*It is stained with blood!*"

With the last words she fell back silent and motionless forever.

CHAPTER II.

TEMPTATION AND CRIME.

Yes, the gold which John Baxter had brought home was stained with blood.

To discover how it had become so we must go back a few hours to the time when, having been baffled in his attempt to commit suicide, he had rushed from the abode of misery with the sudden determination to wreak his vengeance for the wrongs which he fancied the world had inflicted on him, in a word, to become a moral monstrosity.

With a hurried gait he rushed along the street, thence through the City Hall Park to Broadway, and along that now deserted thoroughfare until he reached Wall street.

Why he thus directed his footsteps he did not know. He had a vague, fantastic idea in his mind that, as this was the center of the financial interests of the city, he would in some way be able to get hold of some of the millions of gold there stored away.

How he was to accomplish this, how to break through the bolts and bars, the stone and iron, which jealously guarded the glittering treasures, he did not think of. Like a wild animal, which has tasted blood, and rushes blindly forward in its search for more, so was he impelled by a sort of blood-thirsty instinct for gold.

As he passed the Sub-Treasury, he heard a faint, indistinct

sound in the snow behind him, as of some one approaching, and he crouched in the dark shadow at the side of the steps, just in time to let the person, whoever it was, pass by him without observing him. It was a man of portly bearing and appearance, closely muffled up in furs and a great-coat, and carrying an umbrella in his hand to shield him from the storm.

The stranger appeared well-to-do—was, probably—so thought John Baxter—a belated merchant on his way to Brooklyn across the ferry at the foot of Wall street. Very likely he had gold in his pockets and valuable jewelry on his person. The street was empty, there was no one to see. How easy for the tramp bent on crime to creep behind him and strangle the money out of him.

In spite of the misery he had endured, John Baxter was a tall, powerful man. In his younger days he had been noted as an athlete, and especially excelled in club-swinging, which requires a firm grip and iron muscles. Besides, attacking him from behind, he could take the stranger at a decided disadvantage, and the whole thing could be over in a few minutes.

All this passed like a flash of lightning through John Baxter's brain, and then, with a steely glitter in his eyes and murder in his heart, he crept forward from his hiding-place and noiselessly followed the stranger.

At the moment when, having passed half-way down the block, he was about to spring upon his victim, the latter suddenly paused in front of a private banking-house, the gilt sign above the door of which bore the inscription:

"WILLIAM T. THORNDYKE, BANKER."

The would-be murderer shrank behind a door step, and thus escaped detection. It was lucky for him that he did so, for the stranger glanced several times around him as if to assure himself that there was no one in sight.

Then he drew a key from his pocket and approached the heavy iron door of the private banking-house.

John Baxter, from his hiding-place, watched his every movement.

"Hello!" he ejaculated to himself in profound surprise, "has the portly gentleman come down to Wall street on the same errand as I have? Well, I'll never trust to appearances again. It's lucky, however, that I'm here. I guess I'll have my share of the swag."

The stranger had by this time approached the door, and was about to insert the key in the lock, when he, in turn, made a discovery which drew from him an ejaculation of surprise.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "the door is open! Have others been before me? If so, this ends all."

As he thus spoke he drew a revolver from his pocket and cocked it.

Seeing the weapon and the action, Baxter shrugged his shoulders and philosophically muttered:

"It's just as well that I didn't tackle him. I didn't think he might have a seven-shooter with him."

The stranger opened the door so softly that not the slightest sound was heard, and then stepping into the hall-way, deliberately removed his shoes. These he left in the hall, and, still holding his revolver cocked in his hand, he crept forward in the darkness, silently, of course, but with the assurance of a man well acquainted with the place.

Whether he did not think it worth while, or, in the flurry of the discovery, had forgotten it, he did not lock the front door, and Baxter, reckless of consequences, and determined to come in for his share of the profits at the end of this strange adventure, having noticed it, glided into the hall-way after him.

By this time the stranger had turned the corner of the hall-way, and so was not aware that any one had entered after him, and no sound of the opening of the door reached his ears.

At the end of the bend in the hall were the glass doors leading into the private banking-house, and these doors, too, were open.

"There's no doubt some one has been here or is here still," muttered the stranger, as with redoubled caution he glided into the banking compartments.

These consisted of the usual outer office, with its desks and railing, from which a door, with a ground glass window, opened into the banker's private office, in which was a huge safe imbedded in the wall.

The mysterious portly gentleman saw the faint glimmer of a light proceeding from within the private office, and peering through the keyhole, satisfied himself that there was some one within.

"I'll soon find out who it is," he muttered, with a grim chuckle, and holding the cocked weapon in his right hand, he turned the knob with his left, and suddenly opening the door, strode into the private office.

The gas had been lit, but turned down low, and in the semi-obscurity he saw a young man, with his back turned toward him, kneeling down before the open door of the safe, and just on the point of unlocking the inner compartment which contained the money.

At the sound made by the opening of the door, the young man hastily turned around, and at the sight of the new-comer his face became as pale as death, the keys dropped from his hands, and falling flat before him, he despairingly exclaimed:

"You here, Mr. Thorndyke!"

John Baxter, with some difficulty, had followed in the footsteps of the man who had gone before him, and was now ensconced behind a screen in the outer office, from which he had seen the little tableau which had just taken place.

"Ho, ho," he thought, with difficulty restraining a whistle of surprise. "So this is the banker himself. He comes to his office at night, Heaven only knows why, and finds one of his clerks rifling the safe. This is getting to be decidedly interesting. Luckily I can see and overhear everything; so go on with your play, gentlemen, the audience is waiting."

A sort of grim humor had taken possession of Baxter. He had started out on a career of crime, and already met companions in the same pursuit. He felt sure of being benefited by the upshot whatever it was, and in the meantime the idea of companionship greatly pleased him.

Mr. Thorndyke, for it was indeed he, looked at his prostrate clerk for some moments with an air of surprised severity, then an idea seemed to strike him, and his features relaxed into an expression of pitying compassion which, however, was somewhat relieved by an almost merry twinkle in his small gray eyes.

"So, so," he slowly said, "this is where I find Ernest Minturn, my confidential clerk, my model young man, whom when a boy I took in through charity, and have advanced step by step until I intrusted him with the combination and the key of the inner safe! This is how he repays his benefactor for his confidence and trust."

"Mercy! mercy!" implored the young man, struggling into a kneeling posture, and raising his tear-stained face toward his employer. "I know I did wrong; I know I ought not to have done it. But I didn't touch a penny, sir, indeed I didn't. You can see for yourself that the inner chamber is locked, you can count the money, you will find it intact."

"But you intended to rob me; you would have done so had I not prevented you. How could you thus give way to temptation, you, whose moral precepts were always so high?"

"How," repeated the young man, in a dazed sort of way. "I have had such troubles. My wife—you know I have been married three years—is sickly, and my little girl, too, whom I love, Heaven only knows how I love my child, she, too, has been ailing, and the doctor's bills took away nearly all my salary. I ran into debt, I saw no way of getting out of it save making a hit in stocks. I placed small sums on 'puts and calls.' Sometimes I won, then lost. My position here gave me credit. I took ad-

vantage of it. The fever of speculation was on me. I sank deeper and deeper in the mire until—until——”

He chokingly paused, unable to continue.

“Until you saw no way out of it but to rob my safe,” quietly finished Mr. Thorndyke.

“*Es!*” groaned young Minturn, “Wall street has been my ruin.”

There was a peculiar chuckle in his employer's voice as he muttered half aloud:

“Well, well, you can console yourself with the thought that you are not the only one whom Wall street has ruined. But why,” he added, “did you not come to me and tell me all about it?”

“Ah, sir, how could I after my protestations of horror against stock-gambling? Alas, we know not how weak we are until temptation assails us.”

“Still you need not have had any secrets from me,” slowly and deliberately said his employer. “You might even have come to me to-day during the office hours, and have told me it was your intention to rob my safe this evening.”

“Eh!” ejaculated the young man, stupefied, distrusting the evidences of his own senses.

Mr. Thorndyke cast a keen glance at him, and added:

“I would have patted you on the shoulder and said: ‘*Go on, my boy, and do it!*’”

CHAPTER III.

THE MURDER.

It would be hard to tell which was the most surprised at these remarkable words, the young clerk who had fallen victim to the temptations of Wall street, or the tramp listening in the outer office.

It needed all of Baxter's fortitude not to betray himself by a movement, while young Minturn sprang from his kneeling posture to his feet, and gazed at the banker with a look of horrified amazement.

“You—you would have told me to rob your safe?” he stammered, at length.

“Exactly,” replied Mr. Thorndyke, coolly drawing a cigar from his pocket and lighting it. “Don't look so flabbergasted. Here, take a smoke.”

He offered him a cigar, but the young man feebly shook his head in refusal.

“Don't want to smoke, eh?” nonchalantly continued the banker. “It would steady your nerves though. No matter; take a seat.”

Young Minturn sank into a chair, still with a dazed, stupefied expression in his face.

Mr. Thorndyke puffed away in silence for a few moments as if he was considering his thoughts, then, in a cool, off-hand manner, spoke as follows:

“There are more things in an employer's affairs than are dreamed of in the philosophy of the most quick-witted of his clerks. No doubt you deem me a very wealthy man. You have seen my house on the avenue, my horses, and carriages; you know there are one hundred thousand dollars in gold and bills in that safe; you think all that belongs to me. Ah, well, it doesn't. I owe about ten times as much, and deposits, you know, are trust funds.”

He paused here for a moment to knock the ashes from the end of his cigar, and then continued:

“Your eyes ask where has it all gone? Into the maelstrom of Wall street. Where you have risked a five-dollar bill on a ‘put’ or a ‘call,’ I have ventured thousands and ten of thousands. You have been ruined, so have I. Were a run to occur on me to-morrow, and there have been rumors enough afloat during the last week to occasion one, that hundred thousand dollars would melt like snow under a July sun. I would have to close my doors at noon, penniless, bankrupt, dishonored.”

“Can it be possible?” murmured the clerk, horror-stricken by this revelation.

“I am a very cool man,” continued the banker; “that you cannot have helped noticing. I do nothing in a hurry or without deliberation. When I knew that my ruin was inevitable, I looked about me how to secure as much as possible from the wreck. For some days I've been accumulating that money in the safe for the purpose of absconding with it. I fixed my arrangements for to-night. At midnight a ship leaves from Pier 8, North River, for Marseilles, France. It is a mere freight steamer, and does not ordinarily carry passengers. However, I secured a berth on it under the alias of John Smith. I came here to night to rob the safe and leave the country with the money. But finding you here on the same errand has caused a change in my plans.”

A vague suspicion of what Mr. Thorndyke was driving at crossed the clerk's mind, and he became a shade paler.

“A change in your plans?” he faintly asked.

“Yes, a very simple one. You are to do the absconding.”

“I!” cried young Minturn, springing to his feet in affright.

“Yes, you,” coolly replied the banker. “You will take, say ten thousand dollars, with you, and ship on board the Palissier under my alias. To-morrow I will discover that my clerk has robbed me of all, and I can, then, gracefully retire from business with ninety thousand dollars in my pocket.”

“That's a sweet scheme,” muttered John Baxter; “and these are your lights of society. When a poor wretch like me is driven into crime by misery, these very men turn up their eyes in horror.”

Young Minturn listened to the banker's proposition in dismay.

“I will never consent to it!” he desperately replied.

“Oh, but you will, my young friend,” coolly and significantly rejoined Mr. Thorndyke. “Remember that I caught you in the act of robbing my safe——”

“I only wanted to take a hundred dollars,” interrupted the clerk, with tears in his eyes. “I intended to replace them—indeed, I did.”

“Come, come, you are not such a fool as to believe that such a story will avail you any. You are unarmed, I suppose; I have my revolver to bring you into speedy submission. I can easily overpower you and hand you over to the law. You know the penalty—at least five years in the State prison. Your wife and child——”

“Alas! my wife and child,” exclaimed the unhappy man, bursting into tears and burying his face in his hands.

“You see the position you are in. There is no help for you but to do what I tell you. You will be ten thousand dollars richer by it. I will protect you from the law and send your wife and child to join you.”

“But my honor——”

“Bah! you forfeited it the moment you opened the safe.”

The young man recognized how hopeless his position was. His giving way to temptation had, indeed, given his employer a powerful weapon, which the latter would use unsparingly. A thought of accepting the money and denouncing the banker to the police crossed his brain, but he knew that such an act would avail him nothing. His word would not be taken against the apparently wealthy banker's, and there was the fact of his having attempted a robbery, which he could not wipe out. He had taken the first step in crime, and, as usual, there was nothing to do but to plunge in deeper.

“I—will do what you say,” he said, with a deep sigh.

“I thought you would,” said Mr. Thorndyke, with a self-satisfied smile. “Of course you understand that it will be useless for you to betray me. I shall leave the bank at the same time as you, and take my share of the proceeds with me; so, even if you should be fool enough to give up your ten thousand to the police, I would merely declare that you were hiding the

other ninety thousand, and that you hoped by surrendering a part of the booty to escape with the rest. Now take my advice, and go straight to the ship; you'll have no difficulty about getting on board with this ticket. It was sold to me by the agents here, and the captain has never seen me. Now pick up your keys and continue with the work in which I interrupted you."

It was with trembling hands and a heavy heart that the young man took the ticket and picked up the keys. He opened the door of the inner compartment of the safe, and a faintness overcame him as he stretched out his hands to take out the bags of gold and bundles of bills. It is true, he had come there to rob, but only a small amount to cover his present necessities, and which he had intended to replace before the theft would be discovered, but now he was stealing not of his own free will, but as the tool and slave of another.

"Hurry!" exclaimed the banker. "We may be interrupted."

The deed was done. The bags and bundles were taken out and counted. Ninety thousand dollars were put in a small iron box easy to carry, while ten thousand were wrapped up in some brown paper, making an ordinary-sized parcel.

The banker caught up the iron box by the handle, and fairly forced the parcel under his victim's arm.

"You had better leave the safe open and your key lying on the floor. It will look more probable that way. Come on."

Walking as if in his sleep, more dead than alive, young Min-turn followed his employer from the private office, through the outer one, along the hall-way, and into the street.

They did not encounter John Baxter, for the very good reason that the latter had taken the opportunity, while they were counting the money, to slip out and wait for them in the shadow of the steps of the sub-treasury building, from which hiding-place he had first perceived Mr. Thorndyke.

A great scheme had taken possession of the tramp's mind—a scheme by which with one bound he could acquire wealth, social station, and respectability, as far as this world goes. It involved robbery, murder, and bloodshed, but he did not shrink from it. He had determined to be a villain, and the scene he had just witnessed, was not one calculated to make him waver in his resolution.

"I will show this banker," he muttered, as he crouched in the snow and storm, which were raging more furiously than ever; "I will show him that I can give him a point in villainy."

Making sure that there was no one in the street to observe them, Mr. Thorndyke put on the shoes he had left in the hall-way, and sallied out into the street with his clerk, who had now become a bank robber.

They walked past the place where Baxter was hiding without perceiving him, and when they reached the corner of Broadway and Wall street they halted.

"Here, we separate, Ernest," said the banker, in a kindly tone. "Be faithful to me and I will keep my promise. You will soon be joined by your wife and child, and now farewell."

He stretched out his hand at the last word, but the young man did not take it.

"Heaven pity my wife and child!" he huskily murmured, as he crossed the street.

"Proud to the end," muttered the banker. "Well, my object is gained at less risk to myself than I expected. I will keep his wife and child as hostages for his good behavior."

Lighting a new cigar he leisurely walked up Broadway, intending to take a hack for up-town at the City Hall Park.

Meanwhile the young clerk, with the burden of remorse weighing more heavily on his conscience than did the valuable parcel under his arm, trudged through the snow down Rector street, following the directions given him in a sort of mechanical way, his brain in a whirl, oblivious to all that was going on about him.

Had he not been so self-absorbed, he might have noticed a

tall, dark figure skulking behind him in the darkness, broken only by the glimmer of a light here and there.

The figure kept at a certain distance from him until he arrived at the foot of the street, with the North River flowing darkly a few feet away. Then, in this deserted snow-bound place, it suddenly sprang upon him and fastened its long, lank fingers around his throat.

A single cry for help escaped from the unhappy clerk, then the cruel fingers tightened their grasp, the victim's eyes started from their sockets, his face became purple. Another twist of that iron clutch, and with a convulsive shudder, Ernest Min-turn sank in the snow a corpse.

"The first step has been taken," muttered John Baxter, as he unloosed his fingers from his victim's throat. "Now for the gold."

He stooped over the corpse to pick up the parcel which had fallen into the snow.

At this moment a drunken man, who had come out of the corner liquor store at the cry for help, staggered against him.

The murderer looked up, and even in the darkness there was a mutual recognition.

"Tom, the toper!" he ejaculated, with an oath.

"I say, Jack, ol' fellah," hiccupped the sot, "what yer doin' here?"

CHAPTER IV.

A TRANSFORMATION.

With a terrible oath Baxter flung himself upon the drunken tramp, and gave him such a terrific blow between the eyes that the sot went down like a shot, falling over the dead body of the murdered clerk, where he lay as still and motionless as the corpse.

"So that settles him," muttered the murderer, as he picked up the parcel containing the ten thousand dollars from the snow, and hurried from the spot.

The storm was raging as violently as ever, and the few persons who passed him were too much occupied in protecting themselves against the furious blasts to pay any attention to him.

He thus reached his home without let or hindrance, and, as we have seen, fairly shocked his wife to death with the gold he showered upon her.

After Baxter had convinced himself that his wife was dead he was not sorry for it. Had she died but yesterday he would have sincerely mourned her loss, but from the moment that the demon of crime had taken possession of his soul his love and affection for her disappeared, and she became an incumbrance to him, which he was glad he was rid of.

Baxter coolly gathered up the gold pieces he had flung on the straw and stuffed them in his pockets. Then, gently taking his child in his arms, so as not to awaken her, he extinguished the candle, left the room, and descended to the street.

There are people in New York who will do anything and ask no questions, so long as they are well paid for it.

Such a one was Moses Levy, the keeper of an old clothes-shop about a block from where Baxter lived. He was reputed to be on terms of friendship with most of the light-fingered gentry of New York, and it was said of him that while he knew how to drive a sharp bargain, he was never known to betray his patrons. Baxter knew him well, as most of his clothing and household goods had wandered into his shop, and he knew that he was ready to attend to business at all hours of the day or night.

He directed his footsteps to Moses Levy's store, and arriving there rang the door-bell. After ringing it twice an old man with a withered face, small black, piercing eyes, and dark bushy beard, opened the shutters of the room above the store and poked his night-capped head out of the window. It was the "old clo's" man.

"He! vot you vont?" he asked. "Vot you ring mine bell for? Der's nodding here for nobody."

"I want to see you, Mr. Levy," replied Baxter. "Come down and open the door."

"You vont to see me, eh?" said the dealer, in a suspicious tone. "Vot you vont to see me for, at dis hour in de night? You petter go vay an' come back in de mornin'. I'm an honest man, and dond see peoples in de night."

"I must see you at once, on business."

At the word business the old man pricked up his ears.

"All right, mister," he said, "I will be down in one minute."

He disappeared from the window, and in a few minutes later there was a sound of enough unbolting of bars to give entrance to a fortress, then the door opened, and the dealer, but half-dressed and with an old gown on, ushered Baxter into the store.

He had dimly lit the gas, and the faint light gave a grotesque appearance to the many-hued wearing apparel and the other thousand and one objects with which the narrow, low-ceilinged place was overstocked.

Baxter laid the still sleeping child on a heap of clothes on the counter and gave the dealer a twenty-dollar gold-piece, before the latter could recover from his surprise at seeing the babe.

"I believe you know me, Mr. Levy," Baxter then said, at the same time closing the door of the store, so that the light should not penetrate into the street.

The storekeeper gazed keenly at him for a moment, and then replied:

"I know your face. You haf been here pefore; but you come not any more so much; but I don't remember me your name."

"That's because I never told it to you," grimly replied Baxter.

"I lose money on vot you sell me. It vos such poor stuff."

He looked at Baxter's shabby attire and then at the gold-piece in his hand, and scratched his head in perplexity; he could not reconcile the two together.

Baxter noticed the look and smiled.

"You wonder," he said, "how a poor wretch like me, who sold you his last decent suit, and got these rags from you in exchange, is able to give you gold? Well, I am able; how, is none of your business. Do what I want, and there's more where that came from."

"Pizness is pizness," returned the dealer, with a sly wink, an' mum's de word. Vot is it you vant?"

"First, I want you to keep this young one—it's mine—for a few days until I can send for her. But no one must know that she is here. You understand?"

"I understand," returned Mr. Levy. "Vot a peautiful shild it is," he added, as he gazed at the sleeping babe's features. "Ah, she will preak many a man's heart ven she becomes a young lady. I will keep her like she vos my own flesh and plood. My shildren are all married und gone, und my wife Rachel will love her like she vos her own baby. She knows how to keep mum, too, you kin bet on dot. I will bring the leedle dear up to her now, und den we kin go on mit our pizness."

The old man took up the child as gently as a nurse, and disappeared up the stairs with it. He returned at the end of five minutes.

"She is sleeping in de leedle cradle where my own shildren slept ven dey vos babies," he said, "und my wife is rocking her jüst so nice as never vos. Ve vill take good care of her."

"That's all right!" exclaimed Baxter, impatiently. "The next and more important thing is, that I must have a disguise."

The dealer nodded his head. He suspected, if he did not know, that the man before him had committed some crime, but he was too shrewd to betray his suspicions by a question. Be-

sides, as long as he was paid for his services, it was none of his business.

"You vish to disguise your face?" he asked. "I am an artist in dot line. I kin do it peautifully, und I haf every kind of clothes to match. Vot you vont?"

Baxter deliberated a moment, and then said:

"I would like to appear like some wealthy Californian, say, just come from the West."

"I haf it. You are a big sheep raiser in California, you haf your big estates oud dere, und makes your millions, vich you now come in New York to lose in Wall street. Dey all do dot."

"That's just what I want," exclaimed Baxter, gratified.

"You shave off your beard," continued the storekeeper, "und pull down your mustache, den you brown up your face like vos the sun, you know, den you veer a colored shirt, mit a silk handkerchief around your neck, a velvet jacket, und pants vot come in your top-boots; you haf a diamond pin in your shirt-bosom, und a diamond ring on your finger, you carry a whip in your hand, und den you look yust like you vos com' mit de fust train from California, und your own brudder dond know you."

"That's it, exactly! Can you fix me up in that way?"

"Dem comes purty high. Mit de diamonds und all thrown in."

"How high?"

"Von thousand dollars."

"All right. Get to work on me at once."

"He must have made a big haul," muttered the dealer. "I vos grazzy not to sharge him more. I gits square on him on the diamonds anyway. Yust valk in de back room, if you please," he added, aloud.

He opened a door behind the counter, and ushered his visitor into a sort of sitting-room, which, probably, had before been the scene of many similar transformations as was now going to take place therein.

He bade Baxter take a seat in a chair, and having produced a shaving-cup and razor, put an apron around him and went through the tonsorial operation with all the skill of a perfect barber. Then opening a box which contained a whole collection of chemical preparations, he took out some burnt sienna, and so artistically spread it over his visitor's face, that the facial expression of the latter was entirely changed, and he looked as if he had passed all his life-time in the open air under an almost tropical sun.

We need not detail the rest of the transformation. It is sufficient to state that in less than half an hour it was all complete, and as Mr. Levy had declared, Baxter's own brother would not have recognized in that somewhat flashy, and unmistakable Californian, the woe-begone, tattered tramp of a few hours ago.

Baxter succeeded in transferring his ill-gotten wealth into his new clothes, and having paid Levy, he took his departure from the store.

Moses Levy looked after him for a moment and then locked up the shop, shaking his head.

Wrapping his heavy overcoat, which formed a part of his outfit, closely about him, and feeling delightfully comfortable in his new warm clothing, Baxter hurried over to Chatham square, where he found a hack.

"To the Fifth Avenue Hotel," he ordered, as he sprang into it.

The driver whipped up the horses, and the hack dashed up town at a rapid gait.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the hotel was reached. Tossing a five-dollar gold piece to the driver, Baxter entered the hotel, and, in a firm hand, registered the name of Colonel Edward M. Austen, San Francisco, Cal. Then, throwing a twenty-dollar gold-piece on the counter, he said to the clerk:

"The best room in the house."

It was quite an ordinary thing for wealthy Western men to drop in in this unceremonious fashion, and the clerk, having given him the proper change, assigned him to a room far more sumptuously furnished than any which Baxter had ever seen in his life.

It was with a curious feeling of self-satisfaction that the latter, having undressed, crept between the sheets. At six o'clock he had had not a penny in his pocket, not a crust to eat; now he was rich, and lodged in the most fashionable hotel in New York. True, he had condemned his soul to perdition to accomplish the change, but he did not repent of the bargain.

He slept as soundly as if his conscience was not loaded with the most detestable of crimes, and was up at eight o'clock in the morning. His first step, after having made his toilet, was to purchase a morning paper, and he smiled grimly at perceiving that no mention was made of the murder. If it had been yet discovered, it must have been too late for publication. He next partook of a hearty breakfast, and, having had a dozen cards with his alias neatly written on them by the man in the hotel, he examined the directory, and, having ascertained Mr. Thorndyke's address, took a cab.

"To No. — Fifth avenue!" he exclaimed, as the vehicle dashed off.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRUNKARD'S VOW.

Out in the snow, in the open square at the foot of Rector street, lay the two bodies, one of the murdered bank clerk, the other of the unconscious drunkard.

Fifteen, thirty minutes passed since the tragedy was committed, and no one came that way to make a horrifying discovery. At the end of that time a slight motion was visible in Tom the toper's form; he was gradually recovering consciousness. The motion became more determined, and then he rose to a sitting posture and stared blankly around him.

There was a big bump on his forehead, which throbbed painfully, and his senses were somewhat scattered. The effect of the blow, however, together with the cold and wet, was to dissipate, to a great degree, the fumes of the vile liquors he had been drinking, and he was probably more sober than he had been for a long time.

He could not at first remember what had taken place, or what had happened to him, but he felt that vague impression of the nearness of something which overcomes us in the presence of the unknown dead. He groped about him with his hands, and an icy chill ran through him as his fingers came in contact with the still warm body of the murdered clerk.

"I know now," he exclaimed, springing to his feet as a flood of recollection burst upon his mind. "I had been drifting down this way. I had just come out of the saloon on the corner there when I heard the cry for help. Oh, curses on me, why was I too drunk to be of any service? I suppose it's all over now, the poor man is murdered, and the murderer——"

He interrupted himself with an ejaculation.

"It was John Baxter," he said; "that very man I saved from a suicide's death. Oh, villain, villain! It would have been better to have let you hang yourself. But who is his victim?"

He approached the body with a feeling of awe, and stooped over it to try to distinguish its features.

"It seems to be a young man, but I cannot see the face, it is too dark. Ah, I have it!"

He remembered that he had some matches in his pocket. He drew these forth, and, after several ineffectual attempts, succeeded in striking a light. He held the lighted match so that the flame should illumine the dead man's face, and, no sooner had he looked at it, when the match dropped from his nerveless hand, and, sinking on his knees beside the corpse in the snow, he raised his face toward the inky vault of heaven and fervently exclaimed:

"Heaven is my witness, I did not do it!"

He remained for some moments overcome with emotion; then, with tears in his eyes, he bent over the corpse, and, kissing the pallid lips, in a choked voice, murmured:

"Poor Allie! Poor Allie!"

Suddenly he sprang again to his feet, and gazed affrightedly about him.

"They must not see me here," he exclaimed, in terrified accents. "They will say that I have murdered him. They will condemn me out of my own mouth—the threats I made against his life—the wish I uttered for his death. Heaven knows I've got all over that; but who will believe me, poor, miserable tramp that I am? She alone will believe me—Allie, whose heart will break when I tell her of it. She is an angel. But I must tell her now. I know where she lives. She will be up yet awaiting his return, and alas! he will never come back to her any more."

He brushed the tears from his eyes.

"I dare not touch the body," he continued. "I dare not inform the police. They must find it as the murderer left it. I must be free from all suspicion, if I wish to hunt down his murderer. Poor Ernest!" he added, addressing the corpse, "forgive me for leaving you thus, but here, over your dead body, I register a solemn vow in high heaven not to rest night or day until I have avenged your murder."

He took off his hat, and raised his right hand on high as he took the oath; then he turned to walk down Rector street, murmuring as he went along:

"Poor Allie! Poor Allie!"

Yes, Alice Minturn was awaiting her husband's return.

She had been ill, but was now convalescent, and sat in a rocking-chair, in her plain but neatly furnished sitting-room, rocking her blue-eyed, golden-locked babe to sleep.

The clock on the mantel-piece struck the hour of nine as she cast a wistful glance at the door, and then turned her gaze to the table, where her husband's supper was neatly spread.

She rose from the rocking-chair, and placing the now sleeping child in the cradle, approached the window, and gazed into the darkness without.

"How I wish he would come home!" she exclaimed. "Suppose something should have happened to him—I should die!" She turned deathly pale, and pressed her hand to her heart.

At the same moment there was a faint, timorous ring at the door-bell.

Alice did not pay any particular attention to it. She knew her husband had a night-key, and as she lived on the second floor, the few friends who came to see her generally rang twice.

She was therefore somewhat surprised on hearing a heavy, lumbering step ascend the stairs and stop at her door. A moment later there was a knock, but so faint that she scarcely heard it.

To make sure, however, she opened the door, and started back, with an ejaculation half of surprise, half of terror.

On the threshold stood Tom, the toper.

"Do not be afraid of me, Alice—Mrs. Minturn," he said, pleadingly, to her. "Please let me come in."

The momentary surprise and terror had already left her, and it was in a sincere voice that she said:

"You are welcome, Tom Brewster."

The tramp slowly shuffled into the room, treading gingerly on the carpet, for fear of spoiling its pretty pattern, and, having closed the door, advanced until he stood in the center of the room.

It had been years since she had seen Tom Brewster, and since then she had heard that he had gone to the bad. His path in life lay apart from her husband's; he could bring her no news from him. She attributed his visit to a mandlin impulse of his besotted brain, and her heart was filled with tender pity for the

wreck of one whom she knew to have been an easy-going, weak, but thoroughly honorable man.

"You have come to see me, Tom?" she asked, seeing that he was too deeply moved to begin the conversation.

"Yes, Alice," he tremblingly replied; then, gazing wistfully into her face, he added, "You will let me call you Alice?"

She nodded, with a gentle smile, like that which a person bestows on some poor imbecile.

He paused for a moment, as if making up his mind what to say, and then, his voice still quivering, continued:

"Do you remember when we saw each other last? You—you were not married then, and—I hoped to make you my wife."

"Why recall the past?" she said, sorrowfully, but not in the least apprehensively.

"Let me, Alice—let me," he eagerly rejoined—"for your sake as well as mine. I do not want to harm a hair of your head; I do not want to cause you the slightest grief—but let me, I beg, let me rehabilitate myself in your eyes. Your child is there in the cradle; its sleeping innocence is your guard and shield."

"Won't you take a seat?" she said, indicating a chair, while she herself sat down near the light, at the table, and took up some needle-work.

"No, thank you," he replied, in a husky voice; "I would prefer to stand."

He nervously twitched at his hat for a moment, and then continued:

"You gave me back my ring, and told me that you could not risk your happiness with me—that my nature was too weak—that though I had promised you not to drink any more, I had, more than once, broken my promise. You did not wish to become a drunkard's wife. I was angry, Alice, mad. I heaped reproaches upon you; I accused you of being faithless, fickle, false. But you were not so; you loved me truly, and it cost you bitter pain to give back your plighted troth. But you were right."

"I am very sorry for you, Tom," said Alice, sincerely.

"You are an angel, Alice," he tremulously continued. "But drink was my only vice, Alice; I could be tempted into that, but not into anything else. And if," he added, gazing imploringly at her, "if, when I heard that you had learned to love another, and had given him your hand in marriage, if, in my momentary anguish, I uttered any threats against him, you would not believe that I meant them, much less could execute them? Tell me that you do not believe that I would harm your husband!"

"Harm my husband!" cried Alice, dropping her work and springing to her feet, while her face became as pale as death. "Great Heavens! tell me has anything happened to him? Do you know anything? Has your visit here to-night anything to do with him?"

"Be calm, Alice, be calm, I beg you," he implored, although he himself was scarcely less agitated than she. "I only spoke of threats that I have uttered, but I did not mean them. In my heart I knew that Ernest Minturn was worthier of you than I was, that you would be happier with him than you could be with me. And drunken sot that I was, I watched your happiness from day to day, unknown to you, unseen by you, and I was glad that you were happy, happy in the love of your husband and your child. It made me happy to think of you so, and if I dared to approach the throne of Heaven with my prayers it was to pray that you would always remain so, or——"

He paused for a moment choked with emotion, and then uttered the fatal phrase:

"Or if it pleased Heaven to render you unhappy that you would receive my humble services to befriend and avenge you."

"Avenge me!" cried Alice, clasping her hands in terror, "for what, against what? Oh, do not keep me in this suspense! My husband, you know it, tell me, will he not come back to me?"

Tom could not utter a word.

He sorrowfully shook his head.

Alice uttered a shriek of agony.

"Ernest not come back!" she fairly screamed. "Then he must be dead."

Tom burst into tears.

"Bear it bravely, Alice," he stammered. "Remember there is a God in heaven above us. Direct your widow's prayers to Him; teach your fatherless child to turn to Him for comfort. You have no husband now, your babe no father. Ernest Minturn has been foully murdered, but I know the fiend who did it, and I consecrate my life to avenge the inhuman deed."

CHAPTER VI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

If John Baxter, or rather Colonel Austen, of San Francisco, as we shall hereafter call him, was gratified not to find his crime as yet mentioned in the papers, Mr. Thorndyke was equally pleased to discover no word of the bank-robbery in the morning journals he was reading.

Clad in an elegant morning-robe he was sitting in his easy-chair beside the table on which were the remains of the dainty breakfast he had just partaken of.

He rose from his chair with the intention of summoning his valet to assist him in his toilet, when there came a knock at the door, and a sweet, childish voice exclaimed:

"May I come in, papa?"

Without waiting for the permission, the speaker threw open the door, and a bright-eyed, curly haired boy of about six years of age bounded into the room and impulsively flung himself into his father's arms.

"Good-morning, papa," he said, as he kissed him.

"Good-morning, Walter," said his father, returning the salute with unusual fervor.

Mr. Thorndyke fairly idolized his child. The banker had married rather late in life, and this was his only offspring, his wife having died shortly after Walter's birth.

The boy had inherited his father's sharp intellect, and all his mother's gentle qualities, and pure, noble instincts.

As the boy kissed his father a noise in the street attracted his attention, and he ran to the window to feast his eyes on the pure, white snow lying without, and soon exclaimed:

"There's a carriage stopping in front of the door."

"A carriage?"

"Yes, and a gentleman is getting out. Oh, such a fine-looking gentleman."

"Can it be a visitor for us?"

"It must be. He is coming up the steps. There goes the bell."

Child-like he ran out of the room to open the front door before the servant could do so.

"A visitor for me," muttered Mr. Thorndyke. "At this early hour of the morning. This is rather inconvenient, as I want to get down town. Who can it be?"

Little Walter opened the door and, with the stately demeanor of the English butler, entered the room, bearing a card on a silver tray. He made a ceremonious bow to his father, as he presented the tray to him.

The banker took the gilt-edged pasteboard and read it:

"Colonel Edward M. Austen," he muttered; "I don't know any such man. And from San Francisco, too! What can he want of me?"

Colonel Austen had followed the boy, and, standing on the threshold, had overheard his last words.

"I want to see you only for a few minutes, on business, Mr. Thorndyke," he said, advancing into the room.

The banker gave a mistrustful glance at the bold, adventurous-looking stranger.

"This is hardly the place," he said, rather gruffly, "to speak to me on business. I reserve all such discussions for my office,

where," he added, looking at his watch, "my presence just now is all important."

"Oh, we have plenty of time," coolly returned the colonel; "it's hardly past nine now, and your clerks, I believe, don't arrive before ten o'clock. You need be under no apprehension before that hour."

There was something in these words, as well as in the glance which accompanied them, which turned the banker's blood to ice.

"Walter," he said, abruptly, "leave the room."

The boy, who had been curiously eying the handsomely dressed stranger, ran out of the room, but not before the colonel had patted the lad's curly locks.

"That's a fine-looking lad," said he, when the two men were alone. "Your own, I suppose. He'll be a great man when he grows up."

"I suppose you haven't come here to speak to me about my son," irritably exclaimed the banker.

"Assuredly not, although he is vitally interested in the subject of our discussion. Suppose we take a seat, Mr. Thorndyke. We'll get along better that way."

With an air of easy nonchalance, which no one would have supposed John Baxter to have possessed, the colonel threw himself into a chair, and taking out a couple of cigars, politely offered one of them to the banker.

The latter made a gesture of refusal.

"Oh, come now," exclaimed the colonel, striking a match to light his own cigar. "I know you smoke. In fact, I've seen you."

"You've seen me?" echoed Mr. Thorndyke. "I was not aware, sir, that we had had any previous acquaintance."

"I don't say we have had. Still, I might have seen you without your seeing me. Come now, you'll take a cigar, won't you?"

The banker took it, and mechanically lit it.

"You saw me without my seeing you," he slowly said. "Do you intend me to construe that to mean that you were watching me?"

"Exactly," smilingly replied the colonel, puffing a huge cloud of smoke from his mouth; "and no later than last night."

The banker sprang to his feet. His face grew deathly pale, and his eyes dilated with a sort of desperate terror.

"Last night!" he fairly hissed between his teeth.

"Keep cool, Mr. Thorndyke, keep cool, and don't make any movement toward your hip-pocket. I'd be sure to have the drop on you, you know. We Californians have a trick of doing that, you know."

"I don't believe you are a Californian at all," retorted Mr. Thorndyke.

"See, there, now, how clear-headed you are," continued the colonel, in his bantering tone. "You've seen through me at a glance. Yes, I'm to the mud and manner born. I don't believe I've been out of New York in my life. And my title is only a little dust thrown into other people's eyes, say, like pocketing ninety thousand dollars, and saddling the theft on a poor wretch of a clerk."

"Ha! has my clerk betrayed me?" cried the banker.

"Oh, no; poor fellow, he can't betray you; he's dead."

Mr. Thorndyke started back as if he had been shot.

"Dead!" he gasped. "Murdered! By whom?"

"Oh, come now, you are asking too much," coolly returned the colonel, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "And yet, who would have a motive to murder him—to whom would he be a menace as long as he lived? Who is it that shared ten thousand dollars of the ill-gotten proceeds with him, and gave him a ticket to leave the country? Answer me those questions, Mr. Thorndyke, and I will tell you who his murderer is."

The banker sank in his chair with a groan.

Who was this fiend in human shape who was acquainted with

all he deemed buried in his own heart, who spoke so glibly of the murder of his ill-fated clerk? Had he himself murdered him, and had he come to charge him with the act? The banker saw a web of circumstantial evidence tightening its meshes about him, from which he could not hope to escape. He was most benefited by the clerk's death, and the world would adjudge him guilty of being an accomplice, if not the actual perpetrator of the murder.

The banker was one of those men whom the bad morals of Wall street had made exceedingly lax in all money matters, but who had a great horror of all personal violence. The thought of the gallows looming over his head, innocent though he was, robbed him of all his strength and power of will.

He turned a ghastly face toward the colonel, and with a feeble attempt at a smile, said:

"You know too much, colonel, not to know that I am guiltless of Ernest Minturn's death. I can now understand the object of your visit here. In some way you have obtained a knowledge of—of what happened last night, and on the strength of that you have come here to blackmail me."

"You do me wrong, sir," replied the colonel; "I do not want a penny of you. Nay, more, to prove to you that I have not lost confidence in you, I am ready to make a deposit with you. There is the money. It is eight thousand dollars."

He drew the package with the money out of his pocket, and opening the parcel, placed it on the table.

"You may count it, if you please," he added, "to see if it is correct."

The banker had no need of counting it. He recognized the paper of the parcel; he recognized the bags containing the gold.

"It is the money I gave my clerk," he faltered.

"Well, yes," admitted the colonel, "all except a couple of thousand, which I have used, or intend to use for my own needs. Now, as to my object in coming here. Briefly, then, as a poor, miserable tramp, I followed you into your banking-house last night, and overheard all. I can hand you over to the law. You are as much in my power to-day as your clerk was last night. That would be a case of diamond cut diamond. But moved by a spirit of philanthropy, I come to offer you a proposition which will preserve the honor of your name, and your financial standing."

"I do not understand you," said Mr. Thorndyke, though his heart beat more lightly.

"It is very simple. You anticipate a run on your bank. Restore confidence to your depositors, and they will not bother you about their deposits."

"But how can I restore that confidence?"

"By announcing that Colonel Edward M. Austen, the wealthy ranchero from California, has invested one million dollars in your business, and become your partner."

"You, my partner!" cried the banker, starting to his feet. "You a——"

"Please don't finish the sentence," interrupted the colonel, also arising. "Either I become your partner, or——"

"What shall be the name of the firm?"

"I am glad to see that you are sensible enough to yield. As for the name of the firm, you can make it anything you please, say 'Thorndyke & Co.' We will now go down to your office, and if the clerks are not there yet, there'll be no need to say a word about the robbery. We will have the articles of partnership drawn up to-day, and as I have a young daughter who is now two years of age, and you a bright, promising boy, you may add the stipulation that it is our mutual wish that our interests may be more closely united by the marriage of our offsprings with each other when they arrive at a suitable age."

With a deep sigh, the banker, who was henceforth to be a tool in the hands of the cleverer villain, acquiesced in the proposition, and led the way out of the house to the carriage still standing in the street.

As the colonel had surmised, the robbery of the safe was as yet undiscovered when they reached the office, and before evening the new firm of Thorndyke & Co. was duly established.

The news was spread broadcast, there was no run on the bank, the crisis was averted, but at what a fearful price!

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE MORGUE.

There are sorrows under which people do not swoon, griefs which do not find escape in shrieks and lamentations.

Such was Alice's grief. While her husband's fate was in suspense her tears were ready to flow, her surcharged heart could find vent in words and utterances. Now that the blow had fallen, now that the dread apprehension was a reality, she could only kneel beside the cradle and gaze up into Tom's face with a fixed, strong, tearless expression which frightened him more than her wildest outbursts would have done.

He approached and touched her lightly on her shoulder.

"Alice," he tremblingly exclaimed, "do not give way thus! For your child's sake bear it like a mother. Speak to me, Alice."

She pressed her hand to her heart, as if to still a sudden pain there, and then, rising to her feet, in a dull hollow voice, asked:

"Where is he?"

"You surely do not intend to look upon his dead body!" he exclaimed, fearful lest the agony had turned her brain, "and certainly not now!"

"Yes, now, this very minute!" she vehemently replied. "Am I not his wife?"

"But you have just recovered from a serious illness. You are weak and excited. The night is terrible without. Besides, who will remain with your babe?"

She seemed to be paying no attention to his words, as with feverish eagerness she put on a cloak and hat, and then caught up the child and hastily dressed it without awakening it from its sleep.

"I will take her with me!" she exclaimed, as she wrapped her cloak around it. "She shall have a last look on her father's dead body."

"I will not allow it," said Tom, placing himself against the door to bar her egress; "it would be suicide!"

Alice stood in the center of the room holding her babe to her breast, under the cloak; there was now a vivid red spot on each cheek, while her eyes glittered with a strange, unnatural fire.

"Tom Brewster," she said, and her voice was low and hissing, "it is you who bring me the first news of my husband's murder; you, a rejected lover of mine—you who have uttered threats against him. There are some men who will commit murder and then come to gloat over the agony of their victim's wife——"

"Alice!" interrupted Tom, wildly, "you do not mean—great Heaven! You cannot suspect——"

"I suspect nothing," she continued, in the same low voice, while the spots on her cheeks grew more crimson, and the fire in her eyes more glittering. "They say that at the murderer's approach the wounds in his victim's body will reopen and bleed afresh; they say that in the murderer's presence the still tongue has moved again and the dead lips have pronounced the assassin's name. Tom Brewster," she added suddenly raising her voice, "I demand that you lead me to my husband's corpse!"

"A demand couched in such a form I must obey," replied he, sorrowfully, but with no trace of anger. "Heaven grant that you survive it! Come."

He took her by the hand and led her out of the room. Then locking the door, and putting the key in his pocket, he descended the stairs with her and passed out into the cold wintry night, and at once trudged through snow and slush in the direction of the scene of the murder.

At last, at the end of an hour, they arrived at the square at the foot of Rector street.

Despite the storm a group of men, and even some women were among them, were standing on the spot, ejaculating and talking in excited tones. Some blue-coated policemen were standing on the sidewalk surveying the crowd with an important air, and gruffly answering questions which were continually being put to them.

There was no mistaking the cause of all this commotion and bustle.

The murder had been discovered.

Into this crowd rushed Alice, with her child in her arms, and glancing wildly around her, she exclaimed:

"My husband! my husband! Where is he? Oh, tell me, where is he?"

The crowd respectfully drew back, and muttered among themselves:

"It is his wife!"

"She's got her child with her, too!"

"Poor woman!"

The distracted widow looked around her, but could find no trace of the body of her murdered husband.

"They've taken him away," she moaned. "Oh, where have they taken him? Will no one tell me? I want to look upon him once again."

"Yer see, ma'am," said a policeman, politely touching his hat to her, "some of the boys from our station found him and brought him to the station-house, and the sergeant, he thought it best to have him taken to the morgue——"

"To the morgue!" she wildly interrupted—"among all the dead bodies?"

"Well, ma'am, he was dead, you see," spluttered the officer, hopelessly bewildered by the sight of her agony.

"Tom," she said, turning to the tramp, "get a carriage—anything. We must go to the morgue."

Tom ran up Rector street, and by mere luck, managed to catch a cab, into which he assisted Alice and the infant, and seating himself with them, they were driven to the morgue.

It was long past midnight when they reached the solemn, gloomy receptacle of the unknown dead. A ring on the bell brought an attendant to the door, and on stating their errand, he ushered them into the office of the night-warden.

"There was a body of a man found dead in the street brought into the morgue a couple of hours ago," said the official, when he had heard their story. "It is somewhat against the rules to permit visitors into the morgue at night, but I believe I can make an exception in your sad case. Follow me." And he led the way to the room where the dead were lying upon marble slabs. "I don't know exactly where they have put him," he added; "but I suppose you will recognize his features."

Suddenly they paused before one of the slabs in the rear end of the room, and a shriek from Alice announced that their funereal journey was at an end.

There lay the body of her husband, still clad as it had been brought to the morgue, its face now white and pallid, wearing a tranquil, peaceful air, the red streak around the throat alone showing how the murderer had done his deadly work.

"Ernest! Ernest!" she cried, flinging herself across the dead body. "Gone! gone!—forever gone!"

She took her sleeping child from under her cloak and pressed the little lips to its father's dead ones. The contact awakened the babe, and it commenced to cry. The widowed mother, in turn, pressed her lips to her dead husband's, then, suddenly becoming ghastly pale, she sank to the floor, with her child in her arms.

With an ejaculation of alarm, Tom sprang to raise her up.

She shook her head.

"My—my heart is broken!" she gasped, holding her babe out to him. "Take her—love her—for my sake, and—avenge——"

She pointed to her husband's corpse, and then fell back dead.

With streaming eyes Tom pressed the babe to his breast, and raising up his right hand, solemnly exclaimed:

"Heaven is my witness, I accept the trust!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER.

On the morning of the day on which we resume the thread of our story, Colonel Austen was walking up and down the library of his mansion on Fifth avenue with the short, quick, impatient strides of a man whose mind is disturbed about something.

The colonel is now verging on fifty, his black hair is threaded with silver, and his mustache is turning gray. Years of prosperity have made him grow stout, and given a fluffy appearance to his face, but his eyes retain a peculiar roving light, and a slight hang-dog expression. Some people who have remarked it say that he is troubled by an uneasy conscience; but the reader who has known John Baxter in the past knows that Colonel Austen has no conscience. It must be fear then, fear of the gallows, which attaches its awful shadow to the murderer's feet at the moment he has committed the deed, and follows his footsteps as his other self through life.

"This marriage must take place," he muttered, as he moodily strode up and down the apartment. "I will brook no more delay. Emily is now eighteen years of age and Walter twenty-two. It is time they fulfill their long standing promise to marry each other. Not until his interests are absolutely identified with mine, not until his wife is my shield am I safe from his prying eyes, and his confounded high moral purposes. Thus far I have borne a charmed life, not a breath of suspicion has been directed against me, never has a banking firm been so successful as since I became a partner of the firm of Thorndyke & Co. But the spell may be broken at any moment, and I must secure myself at all points."

He lapsed into silence, and paced up and down the room in profound thought. Then he broke out again:

"Strange! The opposition does not come from Walter's side, where I had reason to expect it. His visits here, especially since his father's death, have been marked by frank cordiality, sincere friendliness. Ah, old Thorndyke kept his promise well; even on his death-bed he revealed nothing, and added the sanctity of a dying father's request to his son's promise. Walter's letters from college were full of an almost ardent affection, and the same spirit breathes in those he writes us during his present tour out West. And now, that, as I believe, he is ready to fulfill his promise, Emily, my own daughter, invents excuses from day to day to delay and bother me. What does this mean? Is there some mystery here? By Heavens, I will find out at once."

He strode to the table and touched a silver bell which stood on it.

The footman answered the summons.

"Where is Miss Austen?" asked the colonel.

"In her room, sir."

"Very well. Please tell her I would like to see her."

The servant withdrew, and a few moments later Emily Austen entered the library.

She was a tall girl for her age. She was clad in a tightly fitting walking dress of black silk, and had her hat on her head. Evidently she was just on the point of going out when she was summoned to the library.

The father noted this fact, and made it the occasion of his opening remark:

"Have I interfered with any important engagement which you may have?" her father somewhat satirically asked. "If so, you may make your visit. Strangers are sometimes preferred to one's father—"

"I merely intended to take a walk," she interrupted, with a sly glance at her father. "The weather is so beautiful."

"It seems to me you take quite frequent walks," he rejoined.

"There are few young ladies of fortune who disdain the family coach so often as you."

She gave an almost imperceptible start, but made no reply.

"Not," he continued, "that I object to pedestrian exercises, they are more wholesome than continual riding in a carriage, but when one desires to conceal one's destination, it is so much more convenient to go on foot and alone."

He cast a quick glance at his daughter's face, and caught a crimson flush which, for an instant, passed over her countenance, leaving it paler than before.

"I thought so," he muttered to himself.

He flung himself into an easy-chair, and motioned Emily to take a seat. Then in a cool, nonchalant tone of voice, he continued:

"However, that's neither here nor there. My daughter can go and come whither she pleases; she needs no prying servants, no duennas to dog her footsteps; she has too high a sense of the duty she owes her father, of her own honor, and the honor of her betrothed, to do aught which may be derogatory to them."

These words were a sort of exquisite torture to the young girl; she moved uneasily in her seat, and bit her lips to repress the cry which struggled to escape from them.

"That reminds me," he continued, in his off-hand way, "that what I really asked you to come here for was to know definitely when you intend to marry Walter Thorndyke?"

She could endure the strain no longer. The question must be answered sooner or later, and the suspense might as well be over at once.

"Never!" she replied, suddenly springing to her feet.

Her father also arose, and stood for a moment looking at her, as if he did not comprehend her.

"Never?" he then repeated, in a low voice, which had a hissing, menacing sound.

"No, never," she rejoined, gazing at him with a defiant air.

"And why not?" asked her father.

"Because," she replied, and there was even a touch of triumph in her tone, "*because I am already a wife!*"

This time her father started. For an instant he turned deadly pale, then a terrific burst of rage empurpled his visage. He made a step toward his daughter, and raised his hand as if to fell her to the floor.

He, however, recovered himself in time, and became cool again. It was a dangerous coolness, something like the slimy iciness of the rattlesnake. He was already gathering his poison for a fatal thrust.

"So the murder is out," he sneeringly said. "Your secret visits, your embarrassments, your reluctance to fix a date for your marriage with Walter, are explained. Naturally, being already married, you did not want to commit bigamy."

"Father, forgive me!" cried Emily, stretching out her arms toward him.

"Bah! what's the use of my forgiveness?" he replied, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. "If you're married, you're married, and that's the end of it. It was my wish, indeed, that you should marry Walter. With his late father's consent, you were betrothed to him at an early age. Perhaps you were too young to love him then, but I hoped that you would learn to love him. As, I am sure, he loves you. However, I had no desire to use any undue influence over your heart, and I do not understand why, when you fell in love with another, you did not come to me and frankly say so."

Emily's face grew radiant as she heard these words, so different from what she had reason to expect.

"Do you really mean it, father?" she exclaimed, impulsively raising his hand to her lips. "Oh, how happy you make me!"

"It is your happiness, my child, which is the dearest object of my life," he continued, gravely. "How far you have increased or decreased it depends on the character of the man you have chosen to be your husband. If he is honorable and worthy, I

will be glad to receive him as a son-in-law, no matter how much I may have preferred Walter; if, however, he is a miserable adventurer, eager only after your money, who has entrapped you into a secret marriage in the hope that I would acquiesce in the inevitable, he will find his hopes of an easy fortune dashed to the ground. In that case, I tell you frankly that I will disinherit you; if your husband has married you, let him support you in any honest trade."

"Oh, I am sure that Vivian Grey loves me for myself alone," cried Emily, enthusiastically; "that he has married me with no unworthy motive."

"And yet a secret marriage is always a suspicious circumstance," suggested her father.

"It was my fault, then," she stammeringly replied. "I was afraid of your opposition, and I loved him so. He is an artist, father, and—poor. He wanted to come here and ask you for my hand, but I restrained him. Yes, I will admit it, I—I urged him to marry me secretly. It was I that wanted to compel you to acknowledge him as your son-in-law."

"Humph! she's got a touch of my spirit," muttered her father; "that's just what I would have done in her case. But it will avail her nothing. When did you first meet him?" he asked, aloud.

"At the art reception last year."

"And how long are you married?"

"Six months."

He gazed at her keenly, and then slowly asked:

"Where does this artist live?"

"Why?" she affrightedly asked.

"I will go to see him. I will bring him here."

"You will bring him here to—to—"

"To put an end to this mystery, of course. There is now no more talk of any marriage to Walter. For your honor's sake, your husband must be acknowledged as my son-in-law."

"Oh, how good, how good you are, father!" she cried, flinging her arms around his neck and kissing him.

He returned the kiss, though hers was an angel's, and his worse than that of Judas.

"There, there, compose yourself," he said, after she had given him the address. "Take off your things and await us here. I will be back with him in an hour."

"Heaven speed you!" she fervently exclaimed, as he left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

VIVIAN GREY.

While his wife was revealing to her father the secret which for so many months had been burdening her soul, Vivian Grey was entertaining a company of choice spirits at his studio.

With the proceeds of the sale of his last picture, probably the only money he had in the world, Vivian had given his brother artists a breakfast in the studio, and the young men, having done ample justice to the elegant repast furnished by a fashionable caterer, were now regaling themselves with anecdotes of their adventures while puffing their cigarettes.

"Come, Vivian," exclaimed one of the story-tellers, "now that I have concluded the tragic history of my pretty model, you must tell us all about the fair unknown who occasionally comes to visit you here."

"The unknown, by all means," chimed in a second.

"Who is she?"

"Let us hear all about her."

"No secrets, Vivian, among brother artists, you know."

These and other ejaculations assailed the young man from all sides, and he finally quieted them by raising his hand and giving an intimation that he would speak.

"Well, then," began he, lighting a fresh cigarette, "about a year ago, at the reception at the Academy of Design, I noticed

a girl, richly clad, young, beautiful—but I need not describe her; some of you have had a glimpse of her here—standing before one of my pictures, with an enraptured gaze. You know we artists feel highly complimented at such naive admiration, and, I am free to confess, that I was as much attracted to her by her beauty as she was to my picture. To introduce myself as the painter and engage her in a delightful conversation followed as matter of course. It's a way we artists have, you know. I would have escorted her home; but she would not allow it, and I let her go without having the gumption even to ask her name. I believe she would have readily told it to me then; after that first meeting it was too late. We made no appointment to meet again, yet I wasn't very much surprised to see the fair unknown, as I already began to call her, at the academy the next afternoon, and again alone. She received me with a blush and an effusiveness of manner which we artists know only too well how to interpret."

"We paint it and call it love at sight," interjaulated the cynical artist.

"Exactly, it was that," continued Vivian; "at least on her side, and I naturally felt that interest which a pretty face and a perfect form awaken in an artist's soul. She became mysteriously confidential, told me her name was Emily, that I must never seek her other name or station in life, that I might call her, say Emily Mason, though she admitted that that was not her right name—that—well, that her whole soul was wrapped up in me, and that she would never, never love any one else, and so forth. The upshot of the matter was that the time came when I seriously proposed marriage to her. Now, at least, I thought she would be obliged to reveal her identity. You can judge of my surprise when she consented to our union on condition that it was to be a secret one, and I felt no great scruples of conscience in doing what I did."

"And what was that?" asked several of his visitors, with interest.

"You know Jack Hawley?"

"Rev. Jack!" cried several. "Of course we do!"

"Irreverent Jack, I think, would be a better name for him," said the cynical artist, "since he was dismissed from the church he was pastor of for certain unministerial acts."

"Still he is a clergyman for all that," rejoined Vivian; "and a ceremony performed by him is a valid, legal marriage. He is under my thumb, however, and if I say it wasn't a marriage, then it wasn't—you understand."

"Exactly. And the Rev. Jack Hawley performed the ceremony for you."

"Six months ago, in the studio here, I made Emily my wife."

"And since your marriage," asked one of the company, "has your wife never revealed to you as much as even the house she lives in?"

"No. The *incognito* is even more strictly kept, if that is possible. She visits me at stated times, and when her form vanishes behind the door there, she disappears like the lady's in the pantomime, and all I can do is to await her reappearance."

"I expect a visit from her this morning," continued Vivian, rising, "and, of course, I must bring our *dejeuner* to a close. I am a married man, you know, and it wouldn't be the proper thing for my wife to catch me entertaining my bachelor friends. So *au revoir* for the present; and, by the way, my little story was strictly confidential, you know."

"Oh, of course!"

"Among ourselves!"

"Sha'n't go any further!"

"You may depend on our discretion, my dear boy."

With these assurances his guests took their departure, and Vivian was left alone.

He became rather moody, and for some moments paced up and down the room in silence.

"I am weary of this mystification," he broke forth at length.

"To-day must end it one way or another. When she comes here to-day she must tell me who she is. Heaven knows I am no villain, and yet, if she is poor, how can I, with my palette and brush, support her. Oh, poverty, poverty, what a curse thou art!"

A knock came at the door.

"It is she," he exclaimed.

He ran to open it, and started back in surprise on beholding a gentleman enter.

"Are you Mr. Vivian Grey?" asked the new-comer.

"I am, sir," replied the artist.

"I have some business with you."

"What is your name, sir?"

"Colonel Edward M. Austen."

CHAPTER X.

BITTER ALTERNATIVES.

"Colonel Edward M. Austen!" repeated Vivian Grey, gazing inquiringly at his visitor. "I do not know, sir, that I have the pleasure of your acquaintance, though your name is necessarily familiar to me."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the colonel, in a slightly satirical tone.

"It is a great honor," continued the artist, pointing to a seat, "for my humble studio to be visited by a Wall street magnate, whose brilliant speculations and princely fortune have made his name a household word throughout the land. Any commission that you may intrust to me, sir——"

"Cease this tomfoolery, sir!" impatiently interrupted the other, as he took the chair indicated, and motioned the artist to a seat beside him. "Why assume this affectation of ignorance toward me?"

"Affectation of ignorance!" exclaimed Vivian, bewilderedly. "I confess I do not understand you."

"Do you mean to tell me to my face that you do not know me, after having married my daughter?"

The artist sprang to his feet with a bound.

"You are Emily's father?" he cried.

"Exactly, young man. Though how in the world you should have married her without knowing who she was, passes my comprehension."

"Oh, sir, how could I know, since your daughter imposed upon me a vow never to inquire? And the sincerity of my astonishment now must convince you how faithfully I have kept my pledge."

"It is very queer," said the colonel; "and, under the circumstances, I must acquit you of any merely mercenary motive on your part. Not knowing the relationship existing between your wife and me, you could not have had any designs on my wealth. Emily, who has revealed all to me this morning, stated that it was at her desire that your marriage to her was a secret one. But I do not know all the details. You see I am talking coolly, and in a common sense way with you. I am neither angry nor excited: but, as your father-in-law, I have the right to know all the steps of this mysterious courtship and marriage. Take your seat again, Mr. Grey, and tell me the whole story. Be open and frank with me—do not conceal the most trifling fact. In that way alone can we come to a proper, mutual understanding."

Vivian sat down again, greatly surprised at this business-like manner in which the affair was being treated.

"I will meet your courtesy with an equal frankness," he began; and then, more minutely than before, he repeated the story of his love adventure as he had but just now related it to his friends.

Colonel Austen listened attentively to him, and, though his face remained impassible, a covert smile every once in a while hovered around the corners of his lips, while his eyes glittered in anticipatory triumph.

When Vivian had finished, there was a moment's silence, which was finally broken by the colonel.

"Mr. Grey," he said, "I am a matter-of-fact business man. As such I cheerfully acknowledge that, if there was any wrong in concealing these matters from me, that wrong lies on my daughter's shoulders, and not on yours. I also recognize, as I said before, the absence of any mercenary motive on your part. The fact that you, like the majority of struggling artists, are poor, would be no obstacle in my eyes, for my fortune is ample enough for all purposes. Were I a free agent, or were my daughter at liberty to act as she has acted, I would be only too happy to acknowledge you as my son-in-law—to have your marriage publicly proclaimed. As it is, however, it is just the opposite which must be done."

Vivian's hopes, which had risen at the banker's first words, were crushed by this unexpected conclusion, uttered in a cold, deliberate voice, which admitted of no gainsaying.

He would have sprung to his feet, but the colonel restrained him, adding:

"Say what you have to say calmly and quietly, and do not let your impulses run away with your reason and common sense. You will have need of both those qualities before we are through with this interview."

There was a peculiar kind of fascination in the metallic tone in which all this was said, and in the cold, clammy touch of the colonel's hand on the artist's wrist. The disappointment, the anger, the sense of wounded honor, died out of the young man's heart, and he spoke and acted as if he were under a mesmeric spell—the spiritual slave of the master of evil who sat before him.

"If you do not acknowledge our marriage," he said, dejectedly, and without any of the spirit which the occasion would seem to require, "what is there to hinder me from claiming my lawfully wedded wife, and toiling up the ladder of life from poverty to competence, as so many have done before me?"

"Yourself, my dear sir," politely returned the colonel. "You yourself are the hindrance. You are poor, and I need not tell you that a lady reared as my daughter has been is entirely unfitted for the drudgery of household work, and would be only a millstone around your neck, even if she should consent to leave me, which of course she will never do."

"But, sir," desperately asked Vivian, "why this opposition on your part? If, as you say, you have no fault to find with me personally, why not give us a small portion of your wealth and let us begin life together?"

"Now you are treading on delicate ground," rejoined the colonel, with a smile. "I told you I was not a free agent; neither is my daughter, though she does not know it. Why it is thus, frankly, does not concern you. You can easily understand that it is not a question of money with me. I will give you a check for one hundred thousand dollars, if you repudiate your marriage with my daughter."

The young man was stunned by this proposition.

One hundred thousand dollars! It was more money than he could hope ever to achieve with his brush. But, on the other hand, he was asked to commit a dishonorable action. And toward whom? Toward his own wife; and that, too, at the bidding of her own father. What mystery was this which forced such a proposition from a father's lips?

No wonder his brain whirled, and that he grew so faint that he had to clutch at the back of his chair to save himself from falling.

"There is one other alternative," continued the colonel's cold, metallic voice, sounding in the artist's ears like the knell of doom. "It is a more disagreeable one. My daughter will, at my command, repudiate her marriage to you, openly, if it must be. If you have the least spark of affection for her, you will not submit her to this ordeal. It will dishonor her in all eyes except yours and mine, while, on the other hand——"

"If I proclaim myself the villain which I am not," interrupted Vivian, "I alone will be disgraced, while she will receive the sympathy due an innocent victim."

"Exactly. That's just the position of affairs I desire. I am glad to see that you catch the point so readily."

"Sir," cried the artist, rising to his feet and gazing steadfastly at his visitor, "you are a monster!"

"Come, come, young man," imperturbably replied the colonel, "we are not here to bandy words, but to act. I have presented to you two alternatives. Either you will state that the ceremony which united you to my daughter was a mere mock marriage, and null and void, in which case you will receive one hundred thousand dollars, or my daughter will proclaim the same thing, with the added statement that she knew it and consented to it. In this case, of course, you will receive nothing from me. You can take your choice."

"But, sir, either proceeding will break your daughter's heart."

"Humph! I'll take care that it doesn't, though I really believe that she loves you a great deal more than you ever loved her."

"I will be frank with you on that point, sir. I did not love her when I married her. To me the affair was merely a flirtation; but now, when you ask of me to either prove myself a villain, or brand her brow with shame, now, at this moment, I love her as I have never loved a woman in my life."

"Your sentiments do you honor," said the colonel, with an ironical bow. "And you will prove your love—"

"By saving her pure name," he interrupted, "and overwhelming mine with dishonor, leaving it to time to vindicate me."

"A wise resolution, Mr. Grey!" exclaimed the colonel, extending his hand, with a gratified air. "Time, sir, is popularly supposed to right many wrongs. Shall I draw you a check, sir, now?"

"Keep your filthy lucre," cried Vivian. "I will not touch a penny of it. I will settle what little I possess and leave the country."

"As you please, sir. You will understand, however, that I am your friend. Necessities may arise where money will be a godsend to you. You may draw upon me for any amount; your drafts will always be honored."

"Enough, enough, sir. Tell me what I must do to—to disgrace myself."

"Oh, simply write a letter to my daughter. You will know what to embody in it. I will take it to her myself."

With a heavy heart and trembling hand Vivian wrote out his own condemnation, every word of which he knew was false and untrue.

He handed him the letter, and then pointing to the door sternly said:

"Go, and may you never regret having compelled me to write such a letter to your daughter."

Having accomplished his purpose the colonel wisely forbore prolonging the interview, and, bidding the young man good-day, was soon out of the studio and in his carriage on his way home.

Emily was feverishly awaiting his return.

For the hundredth time she had gone to the window to catch a sight of her husband and father. At last she saw the carriage, and when she beheld her father alight from it alone, an apprehension of coming evil made her tremble from tip to toe.

She was so excited that she could not speak a word when her father gravely entered the library and closed the door behind him.

"My husband," she gasped at length, "Vivian! Where is he? Have you seen him?"

"I have, my poor child," replied the colonel, in a tone of deep sympathy.

"Great Heaven! How you speak!" she cried. "What is it? Oh, tell me, what is it?"

He handed her the letter.

She feverishly tore open the envelope and devoured the contents of the letter.

Then she uttered a scream which would have melted any heart save her father's.

"Betrayed! Dishonored!" she fairly shrieked, and tottering forward fell unconscious into her father's outstretched arms.

"My poor child! my poor child!" he pityingly exclaimed, stroking her raven locks; but his face belied his words. It was lit up with a gleam of demoniac triumph.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PINK DOMINO.

Six months have elapsed since the happening of the incidents related in our last chapter. Six months, during which time Vivian Grey, the artist, much to the surprise of his friends, had disappeared from the city, no one knew why or whither, and Emily Austen, the banker's daughter, had retired, with her father, to their country-seat on the Hudson, and now reappeared in New York society, looking perhaps a trifle paler than before, but as cold and statuesque as ever.

In the round of fashionable pleasure in which she took part—for the season was now at its height, and balls and receptions, dinner and theater parties followed each other in rapid succession—she was more than ever gay and dashing, yet her friends persisted in saying that she had a marble heart, and pointed to her treatment of her betrothed for proof of their words.

The engagement between Walter Thorndyke and Emily Austen was no secret in the fashionable world; the banker had taken good care that the relation should be well understood, and since the young man's return from his Western trip, an event which had taken place at the opening of the season, he was always in her company at all the fashionable affairs. She was friendly, even affectionate toward him, but at the first ardent word on his side she enveloped herself with a sort of glacial atmosphere, which chilled the utterance on his lips.

However much inclined a young man's heart is toward one of the gentler sex, it cannot long withstand these constant rebuffs, especially if, as in Walter's case, he deems himself entitled to the ordinary privileges of a betrothed.

All this produced a variety of conflicting emotions in Walter's heart, and one evening he took occasion to relieve himself of them to an intimate friend.

It was at a masked ball, given at Madison Square Garden, under the auspices of the Italian Opera Troupe, then performing at the Academy of Music, and known as the *bal d'opera*.

The two men, clad in the regulation full-dress, were idly leaning against the wall of the garden, now converted into an immense ball-room, and were gazing at the merry maskers as they whirled by them in the mazy dance.

We have described our hero when he was six years old, and the reader has but to imagine the fruition of all the noble purposes, the manly qualities, and handsome physique to obtain a mind-picture of Walter Thorndyke at the age of twenty three.

His companion, a middle-aged old bachelor, grizzled in the service of society, was chatting gayly of a hundred indifferent things, when he suddenly asked:

"By the way, Walt, and when is the happy event to come off?"

"What event?" asked the young man, carelessly.

"Why, good gracious, man, your marriage to the banker's daughter, to be sure! A union of beauty and wealth on both sides. You are the luckiest dog of the age, the envied of all! Why, I myself, who have taken a vow of perpetual celibacy, would be tempted to forswear myself could I be the happy man. And you ask what event, in a tone as if it were a funeral, and none of your funeral at that."

"Jack Wilton," exclaimed Walter, with a sudden burst of feeling, "sometimes it appears to me as if it were to be a funeral, instead of a wedding."

"Oh, toity—toity! What's all this?" cried the other, affixing his eye-glasses and staring at his young friend. "Oh, you've had a row, I suppose."

"No," bitterly rejoined the young man; "but to marry an icicle—a woman without a heart!"

"How do you know she has no heart? Every well-regulated young lady of my acquaintance is supplied with that important appendage."

"Do not trifle, Jack. For once in your life try and be serious. I will tell you all, and then you will advise me how to act."

We need not repeat the words, as we have already analyzed Emily's heart, and even given the reader an insight into the motive for her peculiar conduct toward her betrothed.

Jack Wilton listened to his friend's story with more gravity than was usual with him, and, when he had concluded, seriously asked:

"Do you love her?"

Walter started at this question, and he considered some moments before replying.

"I have propounded the question to myself before," he at length said. "There was a time when I was deeply, madly in love with her. You know, we have grown up together from childhood, and at the age when the boy merges into man, with the enthusiasms of life fresh in him, she was for me my ideal. It was about that time my father died, and his last desire that I should marry her filled me with such a supreme joy, that I at once consented. Since then I have traveled and seen the world. New aspirations, new ideas have been born within me. I wondered whether I really loved one who gave me no love in return, who, perhaps, is incapable of loving. Whether love can exist without being mutual. These are strange things for a betrothed to think of. I have tried to combat them, I have struggled against them, yet they will recur."

Jack Wilton gave a peculiar smile.

"Then you wouldn't be very much put out if an accident should happen?" he said.

"An accident? I don't understand you."

"My dear boy, it is an axiom in my philosophy that such a thing as a marble heart does not exist; a woman incapable of loving is a myth."

"By that you mean to imply——"

"That if your betrothed does not love you, it is because she loves some one else."

"Impossible! All her friends are mine, and there is not one of them to whom she shows even the ordinary interest she exhibits toward me. Besides, she is pure in thought, and of a high-minded soul. If her heart were fixed on another, she would ask me to release her from her engagement, knowing that the slightest request in this respect would be at once obeyed by me."

"She may have placed her affections on a person she knows to be unworthy of her, one whom she can never hope to marry, say her father's coachman, for instance," laughed Wilton.

"You are brutal!" cried Walter, turning away.

The next instant, however, he uttered an ejaculation, and firmly gripped his friend's wrist.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"She is here."

"In mask?"

"Yes."

"Oh, ho! The mystery deepens. In mask, at a *bal d'operai* Well, I was mistaken. She is not in love with her father's coachman. It is with some one higher up in the social scale, and therefore, more dangerous. But are you sure that you have really seen her, and penetrated her disguise?"

"I am positive. There she is. Follow my eyes, I do not

wish to point. Do you see that pink domino with a satin mask on her face, waltzing with a cavalier?"

"Yes."

"It is she."

"How do you know?"

"Notice how her domino flies up as she whirls along, and reveals the peculiarly tinted satin dress she wears. There is only one dress of that tint in this city, and it belongs to Emily Austen. Her father had it made in Paris by Worth expressly for her for the charity ball. She wore it then for the first time, and it was remarked by all. I cannot be deceived—it is she."

"Does she know that you are here?"

"One does not generally tell one's betrothed that he is going to a *bal d'opera*."

"Not generally," assented Jack, with a smile, "and as you have modestly kept yourself in the background all the evening, it is very likely she has not yet seen you. Well, now what are you going to do?"

"Call her to an account, of course. I may submit to a great deal, but I must draw the line somewhere."

"Don't make a scene whatever you do, my dear boy."

"Come, the dance is over. I will go in search of her."

He drew his companion along with him, and they traversed the ball-room where the couple in mask and full dress were promenading up and down the highly polished floor.

They encountered any number of pink dominoes, but not the one they were in search of. They began to fear she had disappeared when their attention was attracted to the wine-room, the last place in the world where they would expect to find her.

A tipsy reveler was treating with champagne, and had offered a glassful to the pink domino. She refused, the drunken mask insisted, the domino's escort pushed him violently away, a blow followed, and the brawl became general. Men fought, the ladies interfered, and had their dresses torn for their pains, and oaths and female shrieks filled the air, when Walter dashed into their midst and catching the half-fainting pink domino by the wrist forcibly dragged her out of the *melee*. The mask was still on her face, but her domino and dress were woefully torn.

"These are fine proceedings, madam," he roughly said to her. "Truly a fine place and a delectable company for a man to find his bride in."

At these words the domino uttered a moan and sank in a swoon in his arms.

Walter removed the mask, and then almost dropped his unconscious burden with surprise.

She was not Emily Austen. She was a complete stranger to him.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO WAS SHE?

If she was not Emily Austen who was she, and how came she to be at the *bal d'opera*, clad in the dress of the banker's daughter? She was no other than Alice Minturn, the daughter of the unhappy bank clerk whom temptation and death had overwhelmed on the same night. She was now grown to a beautiful girl of eighteen, fair of complexion, and golden-haired, as her mother was, and as pure and innocent as she was beautiful.

Her father and mother lay buried in a single grave in Potter's Field, united in death as they had been in life, and the mission which Tom, the toper, had taken upon himself was still as unfulfilled as on the eventful night at the morgue.

It was not Tom's fault that it was so; he hunted far and wide for a clew to John Baxter, but he could find none. How was it ever to dawn on his mind that a man could be a miserable, penniless tramp on one night, and a millionaire banker the next day.

In the meantime the little babe, his charge, had to be cared for, and Tom made a strong, earnest resolution to break with his

tramp-like existence, to work, and to conquer his love for drink.

Tom had told Alice of the sad fate of her father and mother, and had watched over her with the love of a parent until she arrived at the age of eighteen, and we again encounter her as the pink domino.

Recently he had obtained a small place on the stage of the Academy of Music as scene-shifter, or something of that sort, and when the *bal d'opera* was about to take place he came home, his face radiant, and bearing a ticket in his hand.

"Do you want to go to the masquerade ball, Alice?" he asked. "I've got a ticket here. One of the girls of the chorus gave it to me on condition that you would go."

"I go to a ball!" laughed Alice, looking up from her work on the very dress which Walter had remarked, and which Miss Austen's maid had brought that day to have some alterations made in it. "Why how could I go? I've got nothing to wear."

Tom glanced at the dress in her lap.

"When must you return that dress?" he asked.

"In a fortnight," she replied. "Why?"

"The ball takes place the day after to-morrow. You could put it on. You would be the belle of the ball."

"How dare I put on what doesn't belong to me?"

"Oh, it's only for a night, and you will take such good care of it that it won't be injured. Come, you have never been to a grand ball in your life. It will be something for you to remember as long as you live. You can go with the chorus who are not on that night, and when the performance at the Academy is over I will come to fetch you home. Don't say no, Alice, dear! It will be such a joy to me to be able to afford you this pleasure."

Like all young girls, Alice delighted to dance; she had a natural talent that way, and she knew what a pleasure it would be to be lifted for one night at least out of the dull monotony of a seamstress' life, yet she would not have consented had she consulted only her own inclinations. It was rather not to disappoint her guardian than for any other reason that she finally agreed to go.

At the ball she enjoyed herself as only a young girl can, to whom all this is like a scene of fairy-land, until the unfortunate alteration took place, and her overstrung nerves gave way completely when she heard herself addressed by a perfect stranger as his betrothed.

As she lay senseless in Walter's arms, the young man became so enraptured with the beauty of her face and form, that he forgot the crowd gathering curiously around him, and made no attempt to relieve himself from his equivocal position until he was touched on the arm by his friend Jack Wilton.

"Come," whispered the latter, "you are attracting altogether too much attention. Bring her into the ladies' parlor."

In a dazed sort of way, Walter lifted his fair, helpless burden from the ground, and Jack opening a way for him through the crowd, he mechanically followed him to the parlor.

The man of the world summoned a maid to take charge of the unconscious girl, and then fairly dragged Walter out into the lobby.

"I know you have made a mistake," he coolly said to him. "I am acquainted with Miss Austen, and I saw at once that it was not she. Luckily, no one recognized you, I believe; so there won't be any serious consequences."

"But the dress," rejoined Walter, still bewildered—"I am sure it was the same."

"Nonsense! You were misled by a mere resemblance. These girls have a wonderful faculty for imitating fashionable styles. Come; we had better go home."

"Without even knowing whether she has revived? You are cruel in your worldly wisdom, Jack. Whoever she is, I owe her an apology at least, and an assurance of my mistake."

His friend wished to detain him, but he forced himself away and hastened to the ladies' parlor.

A dance was going on in the ball-room, and the parlor was comparatively empty.

He looked around for the pink domino, but she had disappeared. He, however, saw the maid to whom he had given her in charge.

"Where is the lady?" he asked of her.

"She recovered soon after you left," replied the maid, "and, in the greatest excitement, demanded her hat and cloak. I gave her the things, and then she went home."

"Alone?"

"Yes. She had hardly gone, however, when an old man came here to ask for her, and he was terribly put out when he heard that she was gone. I believe it was her father. He, too, left."

Somehow, the information, scant as it was, afforded Walter a curious sort of pleasure, though he was as mystified as ever as to her identity.

"Whoever she is," he muttered to himself, as he returned to his friend, "she is evidently a stranger to these scenes; she has gone home alone, and she has a father who is interested in her behalf. All this speaks in her favor."

Yes, Alice Minturn had left the Madison Square Garden alone, but it was not to go home.

She had recovered from her swoon only to be attacked by one of those acute forms of hysterical mania which impel women to suicide.

The thought that the dress she wore, costing probably a thousand dollars, was irretrievably ruined; that she had been mixed up in a drunken brawl; that a stranger had addressed her in terms of coarse familiarity—all this turned the poor girl's head, and as she plunged through the snow, which had set in at midnight, she was as insane as the veriest patient in an asylum.

Her course led her toward the North River. That much she knew, and also that sleeping at the bottom of its icy depth she would not have to face the shame and mortification of the morrow.

On, on she trudged, the few passers-by taking her for an intoxicated woman, and passing her by with a shrug of indifference.

As she reached the foot of the street, she saw a woman, closely wrapped up, drop something on the very edge of the pier and disappear in the darkness and the gloom.

The shock of this sight somewhat counteracted her nervous crisis, and she approached the bundle.

As she did so a cry arose from it which thrilled through her frame.

It was the cry of an infant.

The woman had wanted to commit murder, to drown the child, and through fright at the interruption, had dropped her infantile victim, and made good her escape.

Alice sank on her knees beside the bundle, and opened it. A babe's tearful face looked into hers, two baby hands were stretched out toward her.

She had come to destroy her own life, and she had saved another's.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW MYSTERY.

Tom Brewster came to the ball to fetch home his *protegee*, and what he there learned of the row which had taken place, and Alice's hurried departure, filled him with the greatest apprehension. He knew her sensitive nature, and feared the worst.

Rushing out of the ball-room, he eagerly questioned the cabmen at the door, and finally met one who recognized her from the description he gave of her, and pointed out the direction she had taken.

It was not the way toward home, and this fact added to his anxiety.

He hastened forward, his eyes peering in the darkness and the snow, hoping every minute to distinguish her lithe, graceful form ahead of him.

With the instinct of a sleuth-hound he followed after Alice, guided by her foot-prints in the snow.

As the trail led him nearer and nearer to the North River, his heart sank lower and lower in his breast.

"Alice! Alice!" he wildly cried, as he reached the river; but only the hoarse shriek of a passing steamer answered his anguished appeal.

He was alone, there was not a soul in sight, and the trail led to the very edge of the pier, where it was lost among other imprints.

"There have been others here besides her," he muttered. "Did they come too late to save her?"

On his hands and knees he searched around for some clue to solve this question. His fingers touched something in the snow.

He picked it up. It was a small roll—of what it was composed he could not tell in the darkness. Almost mechanically he put it in his pocket and continued his search.

In vain! He discovered nothing more.

He rose to his feet and looked gloomily at the water. Did it conceal within its depths the body of his darling? He felt like plunging into it, if only to discover that fact. But he mournfully shook his head, and with a despairing heart and slow, tottering footsteps, he wended his way homeward.

There was a faint light burning in the window of his room, which opened toward the street; but he had lit that himself before going to his post of duty that evening, and it told him nothing.

Tremulously he inserted his latch-key in the front door, and, having opened it slowly, ascended the two flights of stairs which led to the floor on which they lived. There were two rooms on the floor; the front room was the sitting-room and his sleeping apartment, the rear room served the double purpose of kitchen and a bed-chamber for Alice. Tom naturally wanted to have the household arranged the other way, but Alice was firm on this point, she would sleep in the kitchen, and the old man had to acquiesce.

As he now paused at the door of her room, a melody came floating out through the keyhole, which thrilled him like celestial music sung by an angelic choir.

It was Alice's voice, and she was singing Fritz's beautiful "Lullaby,"

"Go to sleep, my baby darling."

There was a cheerful, happy, almost triumphant ring in the voice, and like a harmonious accompaniment to it came the sound of the rocking of a cradle or a rocking-chair.

Tom knocked at the door.

"Come in, father, gayly cried Alice, addressing him by the title he loved most to hear issue from her lips.

He turned the knob and opened the door. He remained, however, on the threshold transfixed with astonishment.

There was Alice clad in her night-wrapper sitting in the rocking-chair fondling a baby in her arms, and looking just like the prettiest, happiest young mother in the world.

"Wh—what's this?" stammered Tom, gazing stupidly at the picture before him.

"It's just the sweetest cherub of a girl baby that you ever saw in your life," she cried, with a merry laugh, holding up the crowing youngster toward him; "come and kiss her."

Tom rather awkwardly embraced the child, and then, still stupefied, said:

"I—I don't understand. I went to the ball and heard what had taken place there, and then I followed your footsteps to—the North River. I was filled with great fear lest you had drowned yourself, and now I come home and find—"

"That you've two girl-babies on your hands instead of one,"

laughingly interrupted Alice. "Just let me rock the darling to sleep and I'll tell you all about it."

She succeeded in this after a few moments, and then, having laid the child on her bed, she turned toward her guardian with a more serious air.

"I did want to drown myself," she said, "because a lot of drunken people commenced to quarrel about me, and Miss Austen's beautiful dress got all torn and spoiled, and a young man spoke to me in such a peculiar way, but it was sinful of me to think of such a thing, and the good Lord not only put the idea out of my head, but also made me the instrument of saving that poor child from being murdered."

She went on to relate all the circumstances with which the reader is already acquainted, and then continued:

"When that little babe smiled at me through its tears, when it stretched out its tiny arms toward me, I sank on my knees and thanked Heaven for its mercy. I suppose I will have to endure shame and mortification for what happened at the ball. Miss Austen may be severe on me for having spoiled her dress, but what is that to the intense gratification I feel at having overcome my foolish, sinful impulse, and having become a savior instead of a destroyer."

"You are an angel, Alice, as your mother was before you," said Tom, when she had concluded. "But now that you have the child, what are you going to do with it?"

"Keep it, of course," replied she, as if that was the most natural thing in the world. "If her parents were so cruel and barbarous as to be willing to sacrifice her life, they do not deserve to have her back again. Oh, she is such a sweet little mite. I don't believe she is over three months old; she won't cost anything to keep, and I will work all the harder for her. Please, father, do let me keep her."

"But what will the people in the house, the neighbors on the street, say?"

"Let them say whatever they like. God knows my heart, and I am accountable to Him alone."

"Stay," suddenly cried Tom. "I believe I have a clue to the child's identity. I found a roll of something on the very spot where you found her. No doubt the would-be murderess dropped it, very likely from her bosom. I haven't examined it yet; I've got it in my pocket."

He took the roll out of his pocket and opened it in the light of the room.

Alice uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

"Why," she exclaimed, "they are all bank-notes."

"And each one a five hundred dollar bill," breathlessly added Tom, as he counted them. "Ten notes, that makes five thousand dollars. It must have been the wretch's blood-money!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOTHER'S INSTINCT.

It was about a week after the night of the *bal d'opera*.

In the library of the Austen mansion sat the banker's daughter, so overwhelmed with grief, so stricken with woe as to call forth tears of sympathy in the hardest hearts. Who would have judged her as being heartless and cold, or giddy and frivolous on seeing her thus convulsively clutching a crushed letter in her hand, and weeping as if her heart would break?

Bending over her stood her father, trying to assuage her grief, though the demon of gratified triumph was ever lurking in his eyes.

"It is better as it is, Emily," he was saying. "Heaven in its mercy has seen fit to call your child home. Innocent as you are, made the victim of a degrading villain, a cruel world, nevertheless, condemns the innocent with the guilty. You could never hope to acknowledge its maternity——"

"And yet I was her mother," she hysterically interrupted. "Whatever was my fault, however guilty her father, she, she

was innocent, she was an angel sent down from Heaven to heal my lacerated heart. Oh, how I loved her! With what joy I longed for the time to come when I could see her even in stealth and press her to my maternal breast, though I would have to do it in secrecy! And now, dead, dead!

As if to inflict new torture on herself she unfolded the crumpled paper, and read again, as she had already read for the hundredth time that morning:

"MADAM: I am sorry to be obliged to inform you of the little one's sudden death. About a week ago she was taken with diphtheria. I did not wish to alarm you, thinking that the little dear would pass safely through it. The disease, however, took a malignant form, and she died last Wednesday, after having been ill for twenty-four hours. Owing to the infectious character of the malady, the authorities obliged me to at once bury her, and you were thus deprived of what I know will grieve you deeply, the privilege of gazing for the last time on the dead body of your child. Believe me, however, that I have done all I could under the sad circumstances, and when you have recovered from the shock which these sorrowful tidings must necessarily inflict on you, I will have the melancholy pleasure of showing you the dear angel's grave. With my deepest sympathy and condolence, I remain your humble servant,

"MRS. BROWN."

"And I was not there to kiss her dying lips," moaned Emily, when she had finished the perusal of the note.

"It was well you were not," replied the father with a half-smile.

At this moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come, come, dry your eyes," somewhat impatiently exclaimed her father. "Do you want to reveal your secret to all the world? What is past is past. Tears are of no avail, and to maintain your rank in society you must meet the future with a smile on your lips—"

"While my heart bleeds with agony. Oh, I have been punished more than I deserve."

She put the letter in her pocket, and drew her handkerchief over her eyes. Meanwhile, Colonel Austen opened the door. It was the servant who had knocked.

"Miss Austen's dressmaker desires to see her," he announced.

"Miss Austen is not at home," the colonel peremptorily began, and then suddenly paused, as if stricken dumb.

Alice unthinkingly had followed the servant, and now stood on the threshold of the room. She was poorly clad, and carried in her arms a bundle containing the ill-fated dress, the tearing of which had led to such wonderful events, and was destined to lead to still more extraordinary ones.

The colonel had never seen her before—how should he have deigned to notice so insignificant a person as his daughter's dressmaker! But now that he beheld her for the first time, he was struck with a vague resemblance in her features to one whose spirit sometimes haunted him in his sleep, in spite of his cold-bloodedness and remorselessness.

He passed over to his daughter, and hastily whispered to her:

"What is your dressmaker's name?"

"Alice Minturn," she replied, in the same tone.

His suspicion was satisfied. The daughter of his victim stood before him. She had the right to demand his life for her father's which he had taken. For an instant, as if in a vision, he was John Baxter again strangling Ernest Minturn at the foot of Rector street, out in the night, and the cold, and snow; then he became Colonel Austen once more, cold, polished, remorseless, with another being before him whom he would have to crush.

"You interrupt me at an inopportune moment, Miss Minturn," he said, in his usual easy and unrestrained manner; "but you are at liberty to come in and state your errand to Miss Austen."

Alice entered the room, embarrassed and hesitating.

It had taken her several days to make up her mind to this painful duty, and she had hoped to have seen Emily alone, and

to have been able to appeal to the kind heart which she knew the banker's daughter possessed. The presence of the colonel sadly upset this plan; but it was now too late to recede, and, pressing the bundle against her throbbing heart, she bravely began:

"Miss Austen, an accident has happened to your dress. It was partly my fault, and I am very sorry."

She related the manner in which it became torn, and then continued:

"We are very poor, or we would be glad to replace it. That is, my father—"

"Your father!" interrupted the colonel, with a start.

"I do not mean my real father," she hesitatingly continued, the tears rising in her eyes. "He is dead, sir, he was murdered when I was an infant; but the man who reared me as he would his own child. He found a large sum of money—five thousand dollars, sir—on the place where I found my child; but he says the money doesn't belong to us and we have no right to use it. So I cannot pay you, miss, and I hope, since I have now got to support the child, too, that you will not be hard on me."

"I do not care for the dress," said Emily, rising, and taking the bundle from her, which she carelessly threw aside; it was, perhaps, a little foolish on your part to wear it, but it is a trifling matter to me. I can get another one, and I would not think of charging you with it."

"Oh, Miss Austen, you are so good, so kind!" exclaimed Alice, with a burst of gratitude, raising Emily's hand to her lips.

"But what is all this about your child? I did not know that you were married."

Alice's face became fiery with blushes.

"Neither I am, miss," she replied. "The child is not my own, though I love it so much that I call it mine. It's a little girl baby, which I found on the night of the ball, last Wednesday."

"Last Wednesday!" repeated Emily to herself. "The very night my child died. The story interests me," she added, aloud. "Come, take a seat, and tell me all about it."

She pointed to a chair, on which Alice sat down, while she herself reclined on the sofa.

The colonel, who from the moment Alice had mentioned the finding of the money and the babe, had been an interested but silent listener, took up his position behind them, where he could hear all, without his face being seen.

He knew too well whose child it was—where the money had come from. It is needless to tell the reader that it was at his orders that Mrs. Brown had attempted the destruction of the infant—that it was at his dictation she had written the letter which his daughter had that morning received.

She must have lied to him when she told him that she had thrown the child in the river—lied for the purpose of obtaining the second five thousand dollars he had promised her on the accomplishment of the fiendish deed. He wanted to hear the whole story, to learn why his inhuman plan had failed, and how much had been discovered.

Alice related all the circumstances under which she had found her treasure-trove, the child's age and its personal appearance, and thus concluded:

"And do you know, Miss Austen, if the darling's inhuman parents do not take her away from me, I shall, out of regard for your kindness to me to-day, call her, with your permission, after your name—Emily."

Whether it was the psychic power of these last words or not, a sudden intuition of the truth flashed through Emily's brain. She rose to her feet, became deathly pale, and strove to speak. Her father noticed what was coming and hastily intervened.

"You will do no such thing!" he harshly exclaimed. "The idea of naming anybody's brat after my daughter! You are a very impudent young woman, and, for all I know, this whole story may be but a trick to hide your own shame. Clear out

and never show your face within these doors again, or else you'll not find me as lenient as my daughter."

Half-dazed, stupefied by this brutal speech, Alice retreated out of the room she scarcely knew how, while Emily, who would have rushed after her, was restrained by her father's clutch on her wrist.

"My child, my child!" cried the unhappy woman; "it lives; they have lied to me—it lives. I feel it—I know it. Let me go, father; let me go to get my child!"

"You will not move out of this room," he replied, in a hissing, menacing tone. "Yes, it is your child; it lives——"

"Oh, thank Heaven!" interrupted she, falling on her knees; "thank Heaven for that!"

"But," coldly continued he, "you shall first hear what I have to say to you, and then the door will be open for you to leave."

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

Emily looked at her father in affright.

Hitherto he had worn a mask in her presence; now he threw it off, and she saw him in all the hideous deformity of his moral nature.

He folded his arms and glared down at her as she knelt before him, with no more pity than the wild beast shows for its gasping prey.

"It is time we understood each other," he began, in a low but distinct voice. "Society honors us, and deems us eminently respectable members of its body. Bah! We are whited sepulchers. You are a mother without being a wife, I am a crimson-handed murderer!"

"A murderer! Oh!" gasped Emily, clasping her hands together in the intense agony of woe.

"The robe you wear," pitilessly continued her father, "the diamonds which encircle your neck and flash in your ears and on your breast, the luxury which surrounds you—all, all were purchased by a deed of blood."

Mechanically she made a motion as if to tear the glittering jewels from her person. He restrained her, with a cold, brutal laugh.

"It is too late now," he added. "You were born to poverty, your mother died through want. I was on the verge of despair. I struck a blow, for your sake as well as mine, and wealth—unbounded wealth—was the result. But I had a secret to hide, and it was to hide it more effectually that I have plotted and planned to make you Walter Thorndyke's wife."

"Did you murder his father?" cried Emily, aghast.

"No," replied he; "his father was a villain as well as I. He was an accomplice after the fact in the murder, if not before it. Yet I had to fear him because he knew it. He died without revealing my guilt, but how do I know but he has left behind him some secret confession, stowed away, I know not where, which may at any moment fall into his son's hand. If that son would, in the meantime, become my son-in-law, my secret would be safe. Now you know what a terrible shock your pretended marriage to this rogue of an artist was to me. You were an innocent victim to his wiles, but the world would not hold you guiltless. I had now your secret to keep as well as my own. I have confessed myself to you as a villain. I hesitate at nothing to accomplish my ends. Well, then, it was I who ordered this Mrs. Brown to put the child out of the way. It is not my fault that its life was saved."

"Oh, monster! horrible monster!" moaned Emily.

"Now you know all," said her father; "you have heard what I had to say. The door is open to you. Go and reclaim your child."

He pointed to the door as he spoke.

Emily slowly rose to her feet, and covering her face with her hands so that she must not look at her father's countenance, tot-

tered a few steps toward the door. At the sofa, however, she halted undecided, and then, bursting into a violent flood of tears, flung herself on it, exclaiming:

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do!" cried her father. "Why go, go to this Alice Minturn, tell her that the child is yours, proclaim your shame to the world, and while you are about it you can do more, you can tell her that it was your father who murdered her father. You heard her say that her father had fallen a victim to an assassin's hand. I am that assassin. Tell her so. The world will applaud you."

He paused, expecting her to speak, but only sobs and moans escaped her lips. He could not see her face, but the convulsive motions of her shoulders showed the spasms which were racking her heart.

"But," he added, impressively, "when I am taken away to jail—when you are stripped of all this ill-gotten wealth, when, hounded by society for no fault of your own, you look for refuge in your father's cell in the murderer's row in the Tombs, it may, perhaps, afford some consolation to you to feel that it was your word which consigned your father to his dungeon."

She made a motion with her hands as if to implore him to cease, but he pitilessly continued:

"And when the final day arrives, when I am led out to execution you may accompany me from my cell to the foot of the scaffold, you may stand among the gaping crowd and behold the black cap pulled over my face, you may see the signal given, the executioner sever the rope with his ax, and my body, your father's body, swing on the gallows. Then justice will be satisfied, the law vindicated, the dead avenged, and you place your hand on your heart, and say:

"I did it."

He bent over her as he uttered the last words, and they pierced her heart as a dagger-thrust.

"Enough, enough, father!" exclaimed the unhappy woman, rising to her feet. "It is not out of my mouth you will be doomed."

She did not weep any more. The fountain of her tears was dried up now, in truth, become like marble. Her father's consummate fiendishness had again obtained a triumph. Henceforth she was a passive tool in his hands. The smile which for an instant illumined his sallow face, showed how gratified he was at this new victory.

"We are whited sepulchers," she continued, and her voice was almost as hard and metallic as his own. "You have said it. You have your secret, I have mine. Both must be kept from the world. After what you have revealed to me you cannot expect any filial love on my part. I—I cannot love a murderer. If I consent to do what you bid me, it is only in the nature of a bargain, a contract. I demand a consideration in return."

"And that consideration is?" he asked.

"My child's life. I will marry Walter Thorndyke, if he will have me for a wife—I will keep my mouth sealed as to what you have done, but only on condition that you harm not a hair of my child's head."

"I cheerfully agree to that," he replied. "My only object is that you should not precipitate matters by openly acknowledging it. Leave it where it is at present, this girl will take good care of it, and it will be a sort of compensation for her father's loss if I reward her liberally for her trouble. After you are married, steps will be found by which you can regain possession of your child without betraying your secret. And now to clinch matters I shall go to Walter's house and bring him here. You will hide all traces of agitation, and receive him as a bride should receive her groom. I shall expect you to fix the date of the wedding in four weeks."

"In four weeks," she repeated aloud, adding to herself, "I shall be dead."

He knew it would be useless to offer her, under the present circumstances, any paternal caresses, so taking up his hat and overcoat he abruptly left the room.

"Ah, ha!" he muttered, as he descended the stairs, "you will keep your share of the contract, but as for me, the brat must die, and Alice Minturn must be implicated in the act. I have killed her father, and I will not rest till she, too, is doomed."

CHAPTER XVI.

LOVE AT SIGHT.

Walter Thorndyke had fallen in love at first sight. He was as yet unconscious that he was in love with the Pink Domino—that was the only appellation he knew her by—yet he could not help, during the night following the ball, haunting the stage entrance of the Academy of Music, in the hope of seeing her going in or coming out.

Naturally enough he had only his trouble for his pains. Old Tom he saw on several occasions, but he was not acquainted with him, and, of course, he could not imagine that this was the old gentleman who had come to the ball to inquire for the unknown with so much solicitude.

This search was at last rewarded, and, as is usual in such cases, in a manner he least expected.

As he was about to ascend the stoop of the banker's house, on the morning on which Alice had brought back the dress, he saw her descend, and pass by him so closely as almost to brush his sleeve.

Half dazed as she was by the colonel's brutal treatment of her, she did not notice him, and passed on her way in a mournful, dejected manner.

For a moment he hesitated, and then, instead of entering the house to visit his betrothed, as was his intention in coming there, he turned about and followed Alice at a distance sufficient to keep her in sight, and yet not obtrusively enough to awaken her suspicion.

All unconscious that she was being followed, Alice slowly wended her way homeward, and, on entering her room, found a note on the table from Tom, stating that he had taken the young one for an airing in the park, and would be back with her in two hours, in time for dinner.

"I am glad he is away," she murmured, after she had read the note, "and the child, too. I must have time, time to recover from the cruel words spoken to me, time to become calm and cool again, before I relate to him the result of my visit."

Removing her hat and cloak, she sank, with an air of weariness, on the sofa. For a time she remained absorbed in a gloomy reverie, and gradually her thoughts expressed themselves aloud:

"I am eighteen years old," she murmured. "Tom says that at my age my mother was already married, and that the time must soon come when I will love. Love! I've read about it in novels, and thought it a very silly thing. I laughed at Tom when he spoke to me about it, yes, I laughed until—ah, until the night of the ball."

A deep sigh escaped her lips, and she surrendered herself to a languishing recollection.

"His eyes were dark-blue," she almost dreamily murmured. "I saw them distinctly through my mask. Such deep, dark-blue eyes, so full of intelligence! And then his hair, it almost resembled mine in hue; and his stature so grand, so manly! Ah, but his voice! It was then I fainted, but I hear his voice still ringing in my ears."

She pressed her hands to her heart, and then looked at her wrist.

"It was here he caught me," she continued, "and so tightly, too. There was a red mark on it yet, the next morning. He evidently mistook me for some one else—for whom? Ah, the dress! Yes, yes, that must have been it. He thought I was Emily Austen. She is his betrothed, and I—I am a little fool!"

She impatiently sprang to her feet, and stamped on the floor;

but there were, nevertheless, tears in her eyes, as, with a bitter-sweet pain at her heart, she repeated:

"I am a little fool!"

A knock at the door started her from her self-communings.

"Come in," she said, thinking it was one of the neighbors in the house.

The door opened rather hesitatingly, and Alice could scarcely repress a scream, while a violent flush overspread her countenance, on beholding, standing on the threshold, the very man of her thoughts.

It had required a great deal of time for Walter Thorndyke to summon up courage enough to enter the house. He had passed and repassed the door a hundred times, and probably he would not have entered, after all, had not a servant girl come out of the house whom he felt bold enough to accost.

He did not know the name of the lady he inquired after; but taking his cue from the fact of having seen her come out of his betrothed's house in connection with the dress she had worn, he hazarded the guess that she was a dressmaker. He told the servant girl that he came from Miss Austen with a message to that lady's dressmaker, and was readily admitted into the house and Alice's room pointed out to him.

Now that he stood before her, what was he to say to her, how excuse his great breach of propriety, a breach which, by her painful blushes, he saw she was keenly conscious of.

"Excuse me, miss," he stammered at length, standing awkwardly enough before her, with his hat in one hand and a cane in the other. "I recognized you in the street, and—and I made bold to come here to tell you how sorry I am for the deplorable mistake I made the other evening."

"You refer to the *bal d'opera*," she replied, coldly enough, though her heart was throbbing violently. "You see," she added, with a faint smile, "that I recognize you. The mistake was a natural one. I am Miss Austen's dressmaker, and—well, I wore one of her dresses. It was foolish for me to swoon, but I was unused to such scenes, and very much frightened. From words which you let fall, I have reason to believe that you stand in somewhat intimate relations to Miss Austen, and I, therefore, ought perhaps to apologize to you for having caused you to fall into an error which must have been somewhat embarrassing to you."

His present position was tenfold more embarrassing.

Clad in her simple walking-dress, surrounded by the homely evidences of her industry and neatness, humbly declaring her position to be one of the lowliest in society, and withal crowned with that halo which purity and innocence alone irradiate, Alice Minturn appeared in his eyes more truly beautiful than when he had last seen her in all the glory of a ball toilet.

He was now madly in love with her, and yet almost the first words she had uttered were, whether purposely or not, to remind him that he was pledged to another—that it would be ungentlemanly and dishonorable to let the passion surging in his breast escape from his lips.

He could do nothing but beat a humiliating retreat.

"At least, let me assure you, miss," he said, drawing forth his card case, "of my profound respect for you, and in offering you my card and taking my leave, may I hope that you will remember me as a gentleman?"

He handed her his card as he spoke; she took it, and as she read the name, uttered a slight cry of surprise.

"Are you related to the late Mr. Thorndyke, the banker?" she asked.

"He was my father, miss."

"Indeed! My father was his clerk until he met with a sad death."

"Can it be possible," exclaimed Walter, "that you are Mr. Minturn's daughter?"

"I am Alice Minturn," she replied; "my poor father was murdered."

"I was very young when the sad occurrence took place," said Walter, in tones of deep sympathy. "I have a very faint recollection of the circumstances, but one of the last injunctions my father gave me was to see what had become of your mother and you. He had promised your father to take care of you if anything should happen to your parents, and he bitterly regretted that he had been derelict in that respect. I have all along intended to make some inquiries about you. How strange that we should happen to meet just now. Of course," he added, with a cheerful smile, "that puts our acquaintanceship on a different footing. You must allow me to call myself your friend, Miss Minturn, and any service which I may be at any time able to render you—"

"I have a friend, a life-long one," she interrupted, somewhat haughtily, "and I can count upon his devotion for any service I may require. It will be better for both of us if our acquaintance ceases here. I doubt whether your betrothed wife would greatly fancy the idea of your being a friend of her dress-maker."

She made a slight bow as if to intimate that the interview was over, and Walter, stammering some unintelligible words about his hope of their seeing each other again, left the room.

"So, it is over," exclaimed Alice, when she was alone. "What right had I to hope?—a rich young man and engaged to a wealthy heiress! Bah! I'm glad it's over."

And, perhaps, to show how glad she was, she flung herself on the sofa and burst into tears.

"Your betrothed wife!"

The phrase kept ringing in Walter's ears as he descended the stairs which led to the street. He was angry with himself for having pledged his hand without his heart, with his dead father for having urged him to do so, with Colonel Austen for nagging him on to demand of Emily that a day be fixed for the wedding, with Emily for keeping him on a string—no, he was not angry with her for that, he was thankful to her that thereby he still had an opportunity to draw back. He shrewdly surmised that she would freely and willingly release him from his vow.

Determined to see her on the first occasion, he passed out into the street, and as he did so he noticed an old man, bearing an infant in his arms, ascend the steps he had just come down.

The two men gazed at each other as they passed, but neither spoke to the other.

This incident, trivial as it may seem, somewhat irritated Walter.

Was this the friend Alice Minturn had spoken of, and if so, whose was the babe he carried.

This thought remained in his mind, side by side with the resolve he had formed to release himself from the fetters which bound him to Emily Austen.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. BROWN.

On the west side, in one of the side streets, there is a small, unpretentious-looking house, flanked on either side by its aristocratic neighbors.

At the time to which this story relates the house bore a plain tin sign, on which were inscribed the words:

"Mrs. Brown, Magnetic Physician."

When Colonel Austen left his house, after his terrible revelation to his daughter, it was to direct his footsteps to the residence of the "magnetic physician." It was near the close of February, and the weather, though bright and clear, was very cold and windy, and the colonel, as he walked along, pulled up the collar of his overcoat and pushed his slouch hat far down his forehead. This might have been done as a protection against the wind, but at the same time it effectually concealed his features, and served him almost as a disguise.

On reaching the house he gave a furtive glance around him,

and appeared to be well satisfied that there was no one in the streets to observe him. Then he rang the door-bell twice. Perhaps there was a reason for the double ring, for there were persons who had rung one stroke at different intervals, and the door had remained persistently closed to them.

Now, however, it was almost immediately opened by a bright, intelligent-looking mulatto girl. She seemed to recognize the visitor, for, without a word, she ushered him into the parlor, and then disappeared to inform her mistress. She soon returned with the information that madam would receive the colonel in her boudoir.

Colonel Austen must have been acquainted with the location of the room, for, leaving his hat, cane, and overcoat on the hat-rack in the hall, he ascended a flight of stairs and knocked at the door of the front room.

"Come right in, colonel," exclaimed a voice, which had a cheery, almost youthful intonation.

He opened the door and entered the room, where a middle-aged, stout, buxom woman was standing in the embrasure of a window, feeding a poll-parrot.

This woman was Mrs. Brown, and no one, looking at her motherly countenance slightly wrinkled with age, at her clear, large gray eyes, the benevolent expression which rested on her face, or hearing the gentle voice in which she petted the parrot, would imagine the hideous trade she followed, and which was the source of all the wealth and magnificence by which she was surrounded.

As the colonel entered and closed the door behind him, she ceased playing with the bird, and, advancing a few steps toward her visitor, invited him to be seated.

He, however, remained standing, and a dark frown contracted his features as he abruptly exclaimed:

"You have been lying to me—the brat lives."

A steely glitter came into the woman's eyes for a moment, as she unconcernedly answered:

"I was interrupted in the act, for, as you know, in such matters I do the work myself; I do not share such secrets with any one except the person who employs me, and who must swim or sink with me. I threw the brat, as I supposed, into the water, and made good my escape. I'm not surprised, however, to learn that I missed my aim."

"And you told me nothing of this the next day."

"Why should I, my dear sir?" she replied, with a genial laugh. "First, I was not sure myself whether I had succeeded or not, and then it was a sufficient loss for me to have dropped the five thousand dollars you gave me on the pier, without forfeiting the same amount, which you paid me the next day. But how," she continued, "did you discover that the brat was alive?"

He related to her all that the reader knows, and then added:

"After all, I'm not very sorry that you failed in the attempt."

"Then you mean to have the child live?"

"Oh, no; the brat must die, but its death alone will now not satisfy me. You will have double work to do."

"Twins?" laughed the woman.

"Not exactly," continued the colonel, with a smile, "but this girl, Alice Minturn, about whom I've spoken to you, I want her, too, put out of the way."

"Oh, I can't do that," replied Mrs. Brown, in a matter-of-fact sort of way. "That's not in my line. I'm willing to dispose of infants, but, as for grown folks, you must apply elsewhere."

"You don't catch my meaning," retorted he, "there will be only the brat to be got rid of, but I want it done in such a way as to make it seem the act of this girl. Let her be arrested and convicted of infanticide, and the law will do the rest."

"Still, it is rather a dangerous proceeding," said the woman, "and I would have to be paid liberally to engage in it."

"I will give you five thousand now, five thousand on the dis-

posal of the brat, and ten thousand on Alice Minturn's conviction."

"That would be twenty thousand in all. Make it thirty thousand."

"We will not haggle about the amount," said the colonel, taking a chair and motioning her to a seat close to his. "Listen; this is my plan as to how the thing can be done."

The details of the horrible plot will be developed as the story proceeds. It is sufficient here to state that the fiend of a woman accepted it, and at once set about making preparations to destroy the young life which, at that very moment, was being pressed to Alice's breast, and to bring Alice herself to an unmerited doom on the scaffold.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MATERNAL LOVE.

Filled with his love for Alice, and resolved to break his engagement to Emily Austen, Walter thought that the sooner the latter step was taken the better it would be for his conscience and peace of mind. Therefore, on leaving the house in which the dressmaker lived, he at once directed his footsteps to Colonel Austen's residence.

Arrived there, he learned that both the colonel and Miss Emily were out, and he determined to await the latter's return.

Leaving him, then, seated in the parlor of the girl whom he was pledged to marry, with his heart full of tender thoughts of another, we will see whither Emily Austen had gone.

After her father had left her, she remained for some time in a state of melancholy dejection, when, her eyes falling on the parcel which Alice had left in the room, gave her a sudden idea which made her spring to her feet with a joyous ejaculation.

"I can see my child!" she exclaimed, a happy light beaming in her eyes. "And I need not reveal myself, either. I can bring back that dress to her; it will be an excuse to go there, and I will see her, my heart's treasure, my sweet little Emily—yes, that shall be her name; it was a heaven-given intuition which prompted Alice to name her thus. I will go at once before my father returns."

She rang the bell and summoned her maid, whom she ordered to bring her hat and cloak.

"I am going out," she said, after she had put on her things, and taking up the parcel containing the dress. "If my father returns home before me, you may tell him I will be back in an hour."

Old Tom had come in with the babe, and Alice was holding the infant in her lap, and relating to her guardian the interview she had just had with Walter Thorndyke—for she had no secrets from him—when a visitor was announced, and Emily Austen entered the little room.

"Miss Austen, you here!" exclaimed Alice, rising to her feet in surprise at this unexpected visitor.

Tom made a low bow, and humbly invited the distinguished guest to take a seat.

"I have come," said Emily, as she placed the parcel on the table, and at the same time devoured the babe with her eyes, "to apologize for my father's rude behavior to you, Miss Alice. I hope that you will forgive him, and, as a slight compensation, accept the dress which I have brought back to you."

"As to your father's words," somewhat haughtily replied Alice—who could not so easily forget them, nor the fact that the banker's daughter had the right to enjoy a love which was denied her, "they have wounded me less than the fact that your father could so far forget himself as to utter them. And as to your dress, I must respectfully decline to accept any present from any one. Besides, of what use would a costly ball attire be to a poor girl like me?"

"You are right," murmured Emily, crimsoning with a sense of mortification.

"At the same time," continued Alice, more gently, "I am much obliged to you for the honor of this visit. I know how you must have been pained by your father's language toward me, and whatever feelings I may have toward him, believe me I respect and esteem you."

"And I honor you, Miss Austen," added Tom, "for the motive which has prompted you to visit our humble home."

Emily gave a little start of fright, and gazed covertly at him to see whether he suspected her real motive, but she knew, as he proceeded, that there was no hidden meaning in his words.

"Alice has told me all," he continued, "and to show how grateful we are for your releasing us from any penalty for having ruined your fine dress, we shall call our little treasure-trove Emily, so that we may always remember you by her."

The mother's eyes glistened with joy.

"I am very fond of children," she said. "I dote upon them. As the little one is to be named for me, I'm its godmother, you know. You will let me hold it in my arms for a few minutes, will you not?"

"Of course," replied Alice, with a smile, handing her the child.

Emily took it in her arms, and sat down with it on the sofa.

Only once before had she had the divine joy of pressing her offspring to her breast, and that was shortly after it was born; but the interval of time had only intensified her maternal yearnings, and it was a sweet torture for her to sit there with her own child in her lap, and not dare to indulge in the caresses and tender extravagances of all young mothers.

Fearful lest she should, in spite of all, betray herself, she returned the babe to Alice, after a hurried kiss, and arose to take her leave.

"As I'm little Emily's godmother," she said, as she stood on the threshold of the room, "I must, of course, make her a present. Mr. Tom may sell the dress—the fabric is costly, and will bring quite a sum of money—and the proceeds are to be devoted to my goddaughter; and if at any time you need any money for her support, you must let me know, without any false modesty about it. I will be only too happy to supply it."

Without daring to kiss the little one again, she bade them good-by, and left the room and the house.

"Do you know, Alice," said Tom, when they were alone, "that there's some sort of resemblance in the baby's face to Miss Austen?"

"What are you dreaming of?" exclaimed Alice, with a look of horror.

"Oh, nothing. It's a mere accidental thing, of course. Such a fine lady—it would be impossible!"

Nothing more was said about it then, but the time was soon to come when Alice would have reason to remember this suggestion of Tom.

Meanwhile Emily was returning home, happier than she had been in many a long day, and Walter was awaiting her coming in the parlor. Colonel Austen, however, was the first to arrive home, after his wicked plotting with Mrs. Brown, and, perceiving the young man's presence, had no great difficulty in worming out of him the object of his visit.

"So you wish my daughter to release you from your vow?" he said, without the slightest sign of emotion, though the request came like a thunder-clap to him. "You know how gladly I would welcome you as my son-in-law, yet I would not ask you to become such against your inclination. You frankly say that you love another. May I inquire who it is?"

"I see no objection in telling you. It is Miss Alice Minturn."

"My daughter's dressmaker!" exclaimed the colonel, adding to himself, "It is Nemesis!"

"I care not what her station in life is," bravely replied Walter. "It is enough that I love her, and therefore cannot marry your daughter."

"Ah! here is Emily," said the colonel, passing over to meet her, as she at that instant crossed the threshold of the room.

"Say 'no,'" he hurriedly whispered to her, "or your child dies to-night."

"I will leave you together," he added, aloud. "You may state your request to her yourself."

With a significant glance at his daughter, he left the room, and Emily and Walter were alone together.

"What request," asked she, in some surprise, "is my father speaking of?"

"To release me from my engagement to you, Emily," replied Walter; "a request which I am sure you will not hesitate in granting."

Emily understood all now.

Her child's life was in the balance. Her father had promised to spare it on the condition of her marriage with Walter. Could she, after having just pressed it to her heart, jeopardize its existence?

She assumed an air of insulted dignity, and, while her heart bled for the young man, haughtily replied:

"I cannot release you without compromising my reputation. Our engagement has been of too long standing, and, as far as I am concerned, I am ready to be led to the altar two weeks from to-day."

Walter was thunder-struck.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OATH.

"You refuse to release me from my engagement to you?" asked Walter, doubting whether he had heard aright.

"You have heard me say it," coldly replied Emily.

"But I do not understand," continued the young man, bewilderingly. "I thought that if a gentleman should ask his betrothed to release him from his vows, she, being a lady, would do so, as a matter of course, and I believed that in your especial case, Emily, you would do it gladly and willingly."

"What reason had you for such a belief?" she asked, while a slight flush for an instant passed over her features.

"Mainly a suspicion that you do not love me."

"That is true. I do not love you."

Walter was more than ever surprised.

"You confess you do not love me!" he exclaimed, "and still intend to hold me to my engagement."

"Yes. Love is not essential to marriage. Such unions are taking place in society."

"They must necessarily be very unhappy ones, as ours will be if you persist in your present resolve."

A spasm of anguish which she could not control crossed her countenance.

"Unhappy!" she murmured, in a low tone, yet not so low but what he had heard the word. "No matter! I have said it. Our marriage will take place in a fortnight."

He now saw that she was suffering frightfully. His anger toward her gave way to a feeling of deep pity. He made a step toward her, and in a voice full of sympathy began:

"Emily! We have known each other since childhood. Our engagement was not made by us, but by others for us. Since then I have learned to love another. You have confessed that you do not love me. Why should we make each other unhappy? There was once no secrets between us. If there is a mystery now which compels you to act as you do, why not reveal it to me in the confidence which I formerly possessed, why not—"

"Enough," she wildly interrupted, her face ashy pale. "You are goading me to madness."

She hastily walked to the door and flung it open. Her father was standing in the hall; perhaps she knew he would be there to overhear what she had to say.

He entered the room with an inquiring look upon his face, but he waited for either one of the others to speak.

With an almost superhuman effort Emily controlled her agitation, and if ever she looked like a marble statue, she did at this moment, when addressing Walter through her father in cold, measured, icy tones, she said:

"Father, after an engagement of several years, almost on the eve of our marriage, my intended husband, Mr. Walter Thorn-dyke, is pleased to ask me to release him from his vows, to pose before the world as a jilted bride, the laughing-stock and the object of the sneers and innuendoes of all. I have very properly refused to place myself in this position, and you will tell him that he will be expected to fulfill his promise of marriage or the law will be invoked to compel him to do so."

"You have heard my daughter's words, Walter," said Colonel Austen, in tones of formal politeness. "As a gentleman and a man of honor you will not let matters come to an extreme. However, if they should, it will be your fault not ours, if the attention of the public and the courts is taken up by a disagreeable scandal."

"I must bow to your decision," said Walter, after a terrible struggle with himself. "Heaven grant that you may never become as unhappy as you have rendered me."

With these words he turned on his heel and hastily left the house.

"You have done nobly, bravely, Emily!" exclaimed her father, as soon as they were alone, advancing toward her.

"Stand back, Colonel Austen!" she desperately cried.

He recoiled from the fury which darted from her eyes, and made her form quiver from head to foot.

"Colonel Austen!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "This to me—to your father!"

"Cease that blasphemy," she cried, her hand clutching spasmodically at the air, as if they were itching to scratch his eyes out. "In society, in the presence of others, I may yet be obliged to assume the mockery of a feeling I no longer possess, to address you by the word which threatens to choke me every time it passes my lips. But when we are alone—when a murderer speaks to the helpless, betrayed mother, let there be no hypocrisy between us."

"You are nervous and excited," he soothingly began.

"I am mad, insane!" she wildly interrupted. "I feel my brain tottering, and I keep repeating 'my child! my child!' as a talisman to keep my scattering senses together."

"You were out before, you have been to see your child," said the clear-headed colonel. "It is that which has put you into this nervous state."

"Yes, I have seen my child," she languishingly replied. "I saw her and feasted on the sight of her angel face without betraying myself. It is that which has enabled me to stab Walter to the heart with my cruel, unwomanly refusal. For my child's sake I will do anything that is base and infamous; but remember, only for her sake, not my own. The poison in the cup, the dagger, the pistol—all are handy to me if I want to die, and death would be welcome, oh, so welcome, only I cannot bear the thought of being forever separated from my babe. Swear to me that you will not harm a hair of her head, swear it by that you dread the most, by the gallows, to which I swear I will consign you if you perjure yourself now."

"I swear it," solemnly affirmed he, raising up his right hand to register the oath. "And now," he added, in a lighter tone, "go and lie down a little. You are still hysterical and you need repose to soothe your brain. Once you are Walter Thorn-dyke's wife, we all can breathe in safety. Your child will be restored to you, and your mind will be relieved from this great strain upon it."

He held the door open for her to pass out.

"Remember, you have sworn it," she exclaimed, with the air of a tragedy queen, as she strode out of the room.

He closed the door behind her and then brutally exclaimed:
 "And if I had sworn it a thousand times, the brat must die."

He strode up and down the room like an angry tiger in his cage.

"No, no," he muttered, while a frown black as night rested on his forehead, "I'll not be thwarted in my plans. I have doomed the brat to death, I have appointed the executioner, and the deed must be done. Now, more than ever, since it gives me the means of ridding the world of Alice Minturn, whose life is a standing menace to mine. Shall I let a weak, puny girl come between me and my plan of self preservation? She threatens me with the scaffold! It is true I fear that the most, and therefore I pursue my plot. What care I for her threats. If it comes to the worst a lunatic asylum will always be open to receive her, and I believe that she is half mad already. If the news of the brat's death can only be concealed from her until after the wedding ceremony, I can accomplish the rest."

He paused as if to consider, and after having paced up and down the room for a few moments in silence, broke forth again:

"I must see Mrs. Brown again, and have her postpone her business for a week, and at the same time I will tell her about Emily's visit to the brat. We were bothered this morning for a good motive for Mrs. Brown to get possession of the young one. This visit supplies it. Ah, ah, my fond, dotting mother, you little thought that this very visit to your darling offspring would be the means of delivering it up into the hands of its executioner."

That night he again presented himself at the residence of the "magnetic physician," and the two worthies had a long confab with each other.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LETTER.

The week which Colonel Austen thought it best to let pass by before putting his fiendish plan into execution, lapsed without anything of especial note occurring.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Alice was alone with little Emily. Tom had just left to go over to Brooklyn, where the opera troupe were going to give a performance that evening, and he would not be home until after midnight. The child was sleeping peacefully on the bed, and Alice was embroidering a little skirt which had been bought from the proceeds of the sale of that remarkable dress, when there came a knock at the door and in answer to Alice's "come in," the door opened, and there entered a stout, buxom, matronly looking woman tastefully and elegantly attired.

We need not tell our readers that it was Mrs. Brown, the "magnetic physician," but she introduced herself to Alice as Mrs. Rauleigh, of Rauleigh Villa, on the Hudson, near Inwood.

"I am come, my dear," she said, in her sweet, motherly tones, as she took the chair which Alice proffered her, "on behalf of a certain young lady who I know can count upon your friendship and discretion."

"My friendship, my discretion?" stammered Alice, a little confused. "Whom do you mean?"

"See if you can guess, my dear," said Mrs. Brown, with a smile which heightened the benevolent, sympathetic expression of her face. "Suppose a young mother has a child, and is obliged to conceal its birth from the eyes of the world. Suppose she, in all truthfulness, confides that child to her father's care, not knowing what a villain he is, and he, to avoid any disgrace from attaching to his name, deliberately conspires to murder that child, and suppose that, owing to an angel sent down from heaven to thwart the villain's plans, the innocent infant's life is saved, and the mother learning at the same time of the attempt and its failure, comes here, under a pretext, to clasp her babe in her arms and to thank Heaven that its life is saved—"

"You mean Miss—Miss Austen," interrupted Alice, rising to her feet.

"There, my dear, I knew you would guess her name."

"And little Emily is her child?"

"It was more than an instinct, it was a revelation which induced you to name her thus."

"And Miss Austen is—is not married," said Alice bending over the sleeping child and minutely examining its features.

"She wears no wedding-ring," replied Mrs. Brown, rising to her feet.

"It is true, it must be true," murmured Alice. "The resemblance is perfect. Tom's conjecture was right."

"And now, my dear," continued Mrs. Brown, "since you know so much, this letter from Emily will explain to you the object of my visit."

She handed Alice a note written on a gilt-edged, tinted sheet of paper which bore the name of the banker's daughter.

Alice opened the letter and read as follows:

"MY DEAR ALICE: Mrs. Rauleigh will tell you, even if you have not already suspected it, that I am the mother of little Emily. Already you have once saved it from the cruel fate to which my inhuman father had doomed it, and now that he knows that it is in your possession, he threatens to again attempt its life. It is not safe with you, at least not in your present residence. Mrs. Rauleigh, who is an intimate friend of mine, has promised me to offer the protection of her villa to you and my child. She is rich and powerful. My father would not dare to prosecute his infamous attempts against any one living under her roof. I therefore beg you, my dear Alice, to go with Mrs. Rauleigh to her villa on the Hudson and take the child with you. Not only its life but yours also is in danger if you do not. By the friendship I know you bear for me, by my love for my little Emily, whom you also love, I beg, I implore you to grant me this request. I will repay you a thousand fold. Again I appeal to you by the tie of our common, sacred womanhood to aid an erring sister in distress. Yours in fear and anxiety,

"EMILY."

This letter naturally produced a profound impression on Alice's tender-hearted nature.

Poor girl! How was she to imagine that the whole letter was a cleverly conceived forgery, that the paper on which it was written had been abstracted from his daughter's writing-desk by the colonel, and that Mrs. Brown had written it at his dictation. It was all the more effective by reason of the truth of most of its contents.

Without a suspicion that it was the first step in the horrible plot which had been hatched against her life and that of the child, she turned her clear, honest eyes to Mrs. Brown, and said:

"I will go with you, Mrs. Rauleigh."

CHAPTER XXI.

ENTRAPPED.

"I knew you would, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Brown, gratified. "Emily has given me such a good opinion of your kind heart, that I knew at once you could not refuse."

She drew forth a small gold watch studded with diamonds, and, having consulted the time, continued:

"Put on your things, and get the little darling ready. I have a cab at the door, and we will have just time to catch the six o'clock train at the depot."

"What!" exclaimed Alice, in some dismay, "must I go immediately?"

"Why, of course," replied the woman; "every instant's delay adds to the danger. Neither Emily nor I will breathe freely until you and the child are safely housed in my villa. Once there, I defy this villain of an Austen to harm a hair of the head of either of you."

"But I am all alone. Mr. Brewster, my guardian, will not be home before midnight. He won't know what has become of me."

"You may write him a note," suggested Mrs. Brown, "or,

better still, leave him Emily's letter, with a line added that you have gone with me. That will tell him everything"

This satisfied the unsuspecting Alice. She knew that Tom would justify her step, and that, were he present, he would have urged her to go. She added a couple of lines to the letter, and placed it on the table, where Tom would find it on his return home. Then she put on her hat and cloak, and, taking up the sleeping child from the bed, wrapped it up warmly, without awakening it.

"I am ready now," she said.

Mrs. Brown allowed her to pass out of the room first, for the simple purpose of slipping the letter into the pocket of her seal-skin cloak as she passed the table.

Alice locked the door and put the key under the mat, as she was in the habit of doing when she went out during Tom's absence. Then they descended the stairs, and, passing out into the street, entered the cab, which was standing in front of the door.

The coachman knew his directions, for, as soon as they were in the cab, he whipped up his horses and drove them to the depot of the Hudson River Railroad.

They arrived there a few minutes before six, and the train, which goes as far as Spuyten Duyvil Creek, passing Inwood on the way, was ready to start. Mrs. Brown bought tickets to Inwood, and they took seats in one of the cars.

There were only four persons in the car in which Mrs. Brown and Alice had taken seats besides themselves, and of these two, a man and a woman, got off at One Hundred and Thirtieth street, leaving the other two, both men, apparently dozing in the opposite ends of the car.

Mrs. Brown, who had entered first, had taken a seat on the side of the car toward the river, and Alice naturally seated herself beside her. She engaged the young girl in an animated conversation, and the child having now awoke, she took it on her lap and began to fondle and caress it with all the artlessness of a doting grandmother.

"Alice, my dear," she suddenly said, as the train was nearing Inwood, "won't you please raise the window? The stove gives off a terrible heat, and the atmosphere in the car is very oppressive. I think a little fresh air would do no harm to the child."

Alice thought so, too, and ever ready to oblige, raised the window behind her. This would admit the fresh air without putting the babe in the direct draft.

"Isn't the scenery lovely?" continued Mrs. Brown, half-rising in her seat and gazing out of the open window, while holding the child in her arms. "See how the Hudson River runs like a broad band of silver between the hilly banks. Have you ever ridden on this train before?"

"No," replied Alice, adding, apprehensively, "don't hold little Emily so close to the open window; she might catch cold."

"Never rode this way before?" continued Mrs. Brown, ignoring Alice's last words. "Then the sight must, indeed, be a novel one to you. Just look out here and see how close to the edge of the river the track is laid. There's hardly room enough for a man to pass by. You would think you were riding on a bridge over the water."

Alice rose more for the purpose of drawing Mrs. Brown away than of looking out.

"Yes," she said, with a shiver, "and so far down the side of the bank to the river. It makes me dizzy to look at it. Please sit down, or—or give me the child."

She stretched out her hands to take the infant, but at the same instant the fiend of a woman flung it out of the open window.

The action didn't take more than a moment, yet during that moment the train was rushing on at its topmost speed and was already several hundred yards away from the scene of the tragedy.

It took more than a moment for Alice to recover from the stony stupefaction into which the sight of the inhuman act had thrown her. When she did she filled the car with cries of "Help, help—murder, murder!"

The two men who had apparently been dozing in the corners sprang to their feet and came rushing up. At the same time the conductor and several of the passengers from the next car entered this one.

"What is it—what has happened?" asked the conductor.

Before Alice could reply, Mrs. Brown, in accents of mingled pity and horror, replied:

"Stop the train, sir—a terrible misfortune has occurred. This poor, demented woman has thrown her own child out of the window."

"Thrown her child out of the window?" cried her hearers, horror-stricken.

"I!" shrieked Alice. "I!—my child. It is not my child. I did not do it. It was——"

"Alas, gentlemen," interrupted Mrs. Brown, "you see her condition. These men, strangers to me, were witnesses of her frenzied deed."

"We saw her do it," said one of the men to whom the woman pointed. "We tried to rush up and prevent it, but we came too late."

"Yes," she did it; but the poor thing is crazy, no doubt," affirmed the other.

Alice now fully realized her horrible predicament. She had been lured into the train; these passengers were accomplices of the female fiend who had murdered the child and fastened the crime on her.

"I did not do it," she desperately cried. "Before Heaven, I swear I am innocent. It was this woman who threw the child out of the window."

"Poor Alice!" said Mrs. Brown, in her cooing, gentle voice. "You understand, gentlemen, I am her aunt. She has had a disappointment in love and it has affected her mind. I was bringing her to Inwood with her child, hoping that the country air would do her good. I did not think that she would be taken with a fit of frenzy in the car. You see, gentlemen, she is not responsible for her words or actions."

Indeed, Alice acted like one bereft of her senses, as, indeed, who would not under similar circumstances, and who would take the word of an apparently insane girl against this well-dressed, lady-like gentlewoman—her own aunt, too, as she said? Besides, were not the latter's words confirmed by the testimony of two gentlemen, haphazard passengers in the same car? There was no room for doubt, and no one there, except the plotters and their victim, doubted Alice's guilt, though all were ready to pity and excuse her.

By this time the train had reached Inwood and a moment later halted at the station.

"I am sorry, madam," said the conductor, addressing Mrs. Brown, "but I shall be obliged to hand your niece over to the officer at the depot. You will, of course, explain to him the melancholy circumstances, and I do not believe that the law will hold her responsible for her insane act."

As the constable laid his hand on Alice's shoulder her self-possession entirely forsook her, and with a moan of despair, she sank senseless in his arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DECLARATION.

As this is a veracious history, in which we have hardly taken any liberty except, for obvious reasons, to change the names of the real characters, we cannot do better, in this place, than to give our readers a condensed report such as appeared in the daily papers on the morning after Alice Minturn's arrest for infanticide.

Dispensing with the usual startling and sensational head-lines, the substance of the report was as follows:

"Last evening a tragedy took place on a train of the Hudson River Railroad as it was approaching Inwood, which again reveals a sad chapter in the misery and despair into which a woman can be cast by the falseness and treachery of man. Alice Minturn, a seamstress, young and beautiful, had loved not wisely, but too well. Deserted by the villain who had betrayed her, left with a child, the innocent offspring of her love, her mind became overclouded, and she became subject to fits of temporary insanity. During such a fit, while riding in the cars with her aunt, who was taking her to her home in Inwood, she suddenly raised the window of the car and flung her babe out into the river. At the point where the tragedy occurred the track runs close to the edge of the river, and there is no doubt that the unfortunate child fell into the Hudson and was drowned. The body has not yet been recovered, but it will probably be during the day, as Coroner Herrman, who has already taken charge of the case, has ordered the river to be searched. Much sympathy was expressed for the poor woman by all on the train, also for her aunt, Mrs. Rauleigh, a highly respectable, wealthy lady, whom the unfortunate girl in her frenzy charged with having committed the act. On the arrival of the train at Inwood the unhappy mother was given in charge of the village authorities, who will be obliged to bring her to the Tombs to-day. It is not expected that she will be held accountable for her deed, which was undoubtedly committed while under an insane impulse. If anybody is morally, if not legally guilty, it is the infamous wretch whose betrayal of a pure, innocent girl is the real cause of the sad occurrence, and whose name, as usual, is kept a profound secret. When the unfortunate creature is immured for life in an insane asylum, perhaps frenzied shrieks will penetrate through its walls and reach his callous heart."

This was the report which Walter Thorndyke read, as he glanced over the paper, while sipping his morning coffee.

The effect on him can be better imagined than described. The first picture that came in his mind was that of the old man he had seen going up the steps of the house where Alice lived with the babe in his arms.

It was her child, then. He had allowed his heart to go out to a girl who was a mother, yet no wife. He felt a deep, profound sympathy for her, something of the feeling which animated the report he had just read. Now there was but one duty left him to do, and that was to go to her cell and assure her of his friendship and pity for her sad lot. This he determined to do at once.

He had risen rather late that morning, and it was already noon when he sallied from the house. When he reached the Tombs he found that Alice had been brought there but half an hour before, and, though she showed no signs of violence, had been confined in the padded cell to await the examination of the Tombs physician as to her mental condition.

He had not the requisite permit, but a few dollars judiciously distributed acted as an "open sesame," and he entered Alice's cell to find her seated on the bed, which was attached to the padded wall in a state of extreme dejection.

She raised her head at the noise of his entrance, and a flush of recognition passed over her pallid countenance, but she made no attempt to rise to meet him.

He motioned to the keeper to leave them alone, and that functionary, with a keen apprehension of a rich fee, stepped out into the corridor.

"Miss Minturn," he began, and his rich, manly voice fairly trembled with compassion, "do not deem it presumptive in me for coming here to offer you my friendship and assistance in your sad hour of trial. I owe you this much for the sake of my dead father. Had I done my duty toward you sooner, perhaps the sufferings and trials you have gone through would have been spared you."

"He believes me guilty," murmured Alice, clasping her hands together; "this the bitterest drop of all."

"My fortune is at your disposal," continued Walter. "The best legal talent will be engaged in your behalf. You will have the sympathy of the whole community. No jury will convict

you. If there is any punishment to be meted out, it will be to the guilty person——"

Alice interrupted him by springing suddenly to her feet.

"Do you want the guilty person punished?" she asked, with a strange significance in her tone, at the same time gazing keenly in his face.

He saw the look. That was not the look of guilt—innocence, proud, haughty, conscious innocence, was depicted in every lineament of her countenance.

His heart began to throb violently. Had he judged her too hastily? Was there some mystery at the bottom of her arrest, which the papers had made no note of?

"Do I want the guilty person punished?" he repeated. "Heaven knows I do."

"Wherever the blow may fall?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, in surprise at this strange question.

"I mean," she replied, in ringing tones, "that I am neither guilty nor insane—that I am no mother nor ever was one—that I never had a child—that I never committed the crime of infanticide, or conspired with others to commit it. I mean that there is a guilty being who did all this, and that being is—your betrothed wife, Emily Austen."

This sudden revelation was a great shock to him, and it took several moments before he could speak.

"Miss Minturn," he then said, "you have been arrested on a serious charge. You declare yourself innocent of it. I am glad that you do so. But you make an equally serious charge against a lady who stands in peculiar relations to me. Can you substantiate the charge?"

"I can," replied Alice. "I have always thought well of Miss Austen; she has been very kind to me, and I would not even now betray her were it not that I have at least as much right to protect my life and good name, as she has to plot their destruction to preserve her own reputation."

She then, in simple words and in a brief manner, told all she knew, from the moment of her finding the babe on the pier, to her arrest at Inwood.

Walter listened to her without interrupting her, but the mingled pleasure and indignation which sparkled in his eyes, plainly showed how overjoyed he was to find that Alice was the angel of purity and goodness he had pictured her in his mind, and the thought enraged him that the banker's daughter should attempt to sacrifice her and him to hide her own sins.

"Alice," he cried, when she had concluded, "your words unlock the secret which I have carried in my heart from the moment I first saw you. The thought that my hand was pledged to another, sealed my lips, and I did not dare to reveal the emotion that was surging within me. The knowledge of that woman's perfidy in hiring tools to murder her own child, in fastening the crime on you, in forcing me to marry her, even after I asked her to release me, for the purpose of covering her shame with the mantle of my good name—the knowledge of all this releases me from my obligations to her, and I can freely confess to you that I love, I adore, I worship you."

Alice stood listening to his words, with her eyes cast down to the flooring of the cell, her hands crossed on her heaving bosom, her face crimsoned with blushes, and her whole form quivering with an ecstasy of joy.

"It is a curious place for a declaration of love," ardently continued the young man. "You are in a cell here, under a charge of murder; but this very fact will convince you of the sincerity of my passion and the honesty of my intentions. Alice, look at me, make me happy, tell me that you love me and will become my wife."

And Alice, with the flood of bliss choking her utterance, and finding an outlet only in a deluge of happy tears, sank into his outstretched arms and pillowed her head on his breast, murmuring:

"Walter, I love you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEMESIS.

"Hoity-toity! What's all this?"

Old Tom was standing on the threshold of the cell door, gazing with open-mouthed astonishment at the sight of his ward in the arms of a handsome young man.

He had come from Brooklyn, long after midnight, and had been greatly surprised at receiving no welcome from Alice. He knew that it was her custom to remain up for him, no matter how late he came home, and he began to grow apprehensive.

He knocked at the door, repeating the knocks each time louder than before, but there was no sound from within, not even the cry of the babe.

He drew forth a match and, striking a light, applied it to the keyhole. There was no key on the inside of the lock.

He turned over the mat and found the key.

"Alice has gone out and not come back," he exclaimed.

"Where can she have gone to? She must have left me word."

He unlocked the door and entered her room. It was pitch-dark.

With a trembling hand he struck another match and lighted the lamp.

The light fell on the empty room, the table and chairs, but revealed no note, no scrap of paper which could inform him of what had taken place during his absence.

He became terribly frightened, yet he sought to control his fears by repeating to himself, "She will have left some word in my room."

He took up the lamp and hastily went to his own room, through the door which connected the two apartments.

But though he searched high and low, he found nothing which could enlighten him on this new mystery.

"Some misfortune has happened," he muttered, while the cold sweat started on his forehead. "It is my fault. I ought not to have left her alone. But how to discover it, how to know what has occurred? I must awaken the inmates of the house, no matter how late it is. They will be able to tell me something."

He was saved the trouble of doing this, for the family on the floor below had already been aroused by his repeated knockings, and as he stepped out on the landing a woman in her night-gown poked out her night-capped head through the crack of her door and shrilly cried:

"Yer needn't wake up the whole house with yer racket. The gals gone, an' good riddance to bad rubbish."

"Gone!" exclaimed Tom, swallowing his indignation at this spiteful speech, in his desire to learn further particulars.

"Yes, she went off in a mighty fine carriage, with a lady as was all dressed in silks and diamonds, an' they took the brat along with 'em, an' that's all I know."

With which words the woman drew in her head and slammed her door shut.

Tom was unable to obtain any further information, yet upon what he had learned he built up a theory which greatly relieved him from his apprehension.

"It must have been Miss Austen," he said to himself, as he re-entered the room. I dare say that my suspicions, based upon the resemblance of the child to her, and her actions when she was here last, are correct. She is its mother, and she came to fetch Alice and the young one to some place of safety, where the little one would not be exposed to danger—probably from her own father, who, from what I have heard of him, must be a villain. Perhaps, also, she was afraid of leaving word lest it should fall into the hands of those who are conspiring against the life of the child. If so, I shall hear from Alice in the morning, and the best thing I can do now is to go to bed."

It was thus in a much more contented frame of mind than he had expected that he retired for the night, only to have his castle in the air rudely toppled over on the next morning, by having the paper, containing the report already recited, thrust under his nose by his amiable informant of the night before.

At first poor Tom was fairly stunned. He mechanically read and re-read the article, without obtaining a definite idea of its contents, except that the child was murdered, and Alice arrested as its murderess.

"It is false, it is a lie!" he wildly cried. "I wouldn't believe it if there were ten thousand witnesses to the act. I will go to Inwood at once. I will see the judge. I will tell him it is a base conspiracy. Oh, he will let her go; he must let her go, or I will kill him!"

How he ever got to Inwood he scarcely knew himself. He arrived there only to learn that Alice had been conveyed to the Tombs. He came back to the city, was admitted into the jail, and entered the cell in time to witness the scene described at the close of the preceding chapter.

Of course, all the details had to be gone over again, and, of course, he hugged Alice and Walter in perfect frenzy of delight.

"You are a noble, generous young man," he exclaimed, when the emotions of all had been somewhat quieted down. "Alice's father lost his life while in the employ of your father, and it is an act of poetical justice, rare to be found on earth, for you to make her your wife. She will be happy with you, I know, for she says she loves you, and if she does not make you happy, you deserve—well, you deserve to be taken out into the prison-yard here, and be hung on the spot. That's my candid opinion."

"I prefer hanging around here," gayly replied Walter, glancing at Alice. "And now I am anxious to proceed to Emily Austen's house and confound her with the evidence of her guilt. I will make her confess, even though it be at the end of a pistol."

He left the cell, taking Tom along with him as a witness.

On reaching the Austen mansion, and asking to see Miss Austen, they were met with the reply that the lady was too ill to see anybody. He rudely pushed the footman out of the way, and followed by Tom, ascended the stairs to where he knew Emily's room was situated.

Wishing to surprise her, he did not even knock, but turning the knob, opened the door and entered the apartment.

Emily had just left her bed after a severe nervous prostration, and, clad in a morning-gown of pure white, she lay extended on the sofa, so pale and wan-looking, so like an ethereal being hovering twixt heaven and earth, that the anger died out of the men's hearts, and they could only stand and gaze at her with the feeling of awe which take possession of one in the presence of the dying.

A slight flush passed over her colorless cheeks as she saw Walter enter, and extending her thin, almost transparent hand toward him, faintly said:

"You come at last to see me. Is this the way to treat your bride when she is lying at the point of death?"

The word "bride" in her mouth jarred Walter's sensibilities, and re-awakened his rage against her.

"Miserable woman!" he exclaimed. "If you are dying, it is Heaven's mercy which is removing you from earth to save you from an expiation on the scaffold of your crime."

"My crime!" cried she, rising herself up on the sofa, and staring at Walter with a fixed expression of terror.

"A murderess!" he continued, as the recollections of what had occurred intensified all his indignation, "an infanticide—"

"No, no!" she screamed, springing to her feet, and then falling on her knees before the young man. "You know not what you are saying. My child lives—not a hair of her head is

touched. He swore it. I tell you, Walter, my child lives——"

"Your child has been foully murdered by your accomplice," sternly replied the young man.

"Murdered—foully murdered—by my accomplice," she repeated, bewilderedly, passing her hands over her forehead, as if to chase away a horrible nightmare.

Then her agitation suddenly left her, and she rose to her feet, standing as cold and motionless as a statue hewn out of marble—a statue of Nemesis.

"Prove to me," she said, in a dull, heavy voice, without the quiver of an emotion, "prove to me that my child has been murdered!"

Somewhat awed by her manner, Walter handed her the paper containing the report.

She read it through slowly and deliberately. When she raised her eyes from the page, they shone with the light which illumined Brutus' eyes when he condemned his son to death.

At this instant, Colonel Austen, who had just returned home, and heard who had entered the house during his absence, came into the room.

Emily pointed her finger—it was the finger of fate—at her father, and with the sternness and solemnity of a judge, said:

"There stands the purjured villain! There stands the murderer of my child! There stands the assassin of Ernest Minturn!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

All through the interview between Emily Austen and Walter, old Tom had felt himself to be out of place. His kindly heart and gentle nature were too much touched by the sight of her suffering for him to harbor any resentment against her. He, therefore, kept backing toward the window, until he found himself ensconced behind the heavy damask curtains, and completely screened from view.

When Colonel Austen entered the room he saw only his daughter and Walter, and when she hurled her terrible accusation against him, he did not lose his presence of mind.

"She is again taken with one of her fits," he coolly exclaimed. "I'm sorry, Walter, that I was not present to prevent your entering here. It must be very painful to you to behold your bride in this condition."

"Infamous monster!" retorted the young man, quivering with indignation. "I believe every word she says. If her brain is tottering it is because you have made her, too, your victim. But the law will deal with you."

"Bah for the law!" cried the colonel, defiantly. "My daughter is as mad as a March hare. She can prove nothing against me."

"But I can, John Baxter, and I will!"

It was Tom who uttered these words. He had issued from behind the curtains and confronted the villain as the executioner confronts the doomed criminal on the scaffold.

John Baxter!

For sixteen years the murderer had not heard that name, and now it sounded the knell of doom in his ears.

He knew it, and his hand mechanically sought the pistol in his hip-pocket.

"Who are you?" he hoarsely cried.

"I am Tom Brewster," replied the old man; "Tom, the toper, as you knew me. I saw you strangle Ernest Minturn. I am the witness to the murder you committed."

"Then die!" shouted the villain, leveling his pistol at Tom's breast.

Before, however, he could pull the trigger, Tom sprang upon him like a famished tiger on his prey. He clutched him round

the neck as John Baxter had, sixteen years before, clutched the unhappy bank-clerk.

There was a short, desperate struggle, a cry from Walter's lips, a shriek from Emily, then the discharge of the weapon, and John Baxter, alias Colonel Edward M. Austen, lay stretched on the carpeted floor with a bullet in his heart, while Tom placed his foot on the neck of the bleeding corpse—his mission fulfilled.

Though the murderer richly deserved his fate, Tom's hand was free from any stain of blood. In the scuffle the pistol had become accidentally discharged, the shot producing instantaneous death.

The strain which had preserved Emily's consciousness gave way, the fatal punishment being inflicted, the Nemesis became the daughter again, and, with a wild shriek of despair, she fell across her father's dead body, where she lay stiff and motionless.

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Walter, kneeling down beside her. "Her sorrows in this life are over!"

* * * * *

Emily Austen awoke to find herself lying in a bed; to find her child, her little Emily, on her maternal breast, its tiny arms folded around her neck, its smiling face pressed close to hers, its baby prattle, intelligent to her alone, sounding like sweet music in her ear.

Walter and Alice were standing at the head of the bed, while Tom and the family physician were near the foot.

She gazed wonderingly at them for a moment, then, giving up all idea of comprehending what had happened, she folded her arms around her child, and pressed her lips convulsively to hers.

The doctor smiled, and reassuringly said:

"The danger is passed. You may speak to her, Mr. Thorn-dyke."

"Emily," said Walter, gently, "you have passed through great suffering; your babe, whom you see, is alive, not dead, has brought you back from the brink of the grave, to a new and happier life. Do you feel strong enough to hear of a great joy?"

"There can be no greater joy," she murmured, "than to again clasp my child to my breast."

"But to learn how its life was saved, and by whom?" continued the young man.

And then he told her of a scene which had occurred almost immediately after her father's death, and while she lay prone on the floor. How a tramp had come into the room bearing the child in his arms; how, horror-stricken at the sight before him, he had sunk on the floor and embraced Emily's body, calling her his wife, and imploring her to awaken, if only for a moment, and listen to the story of how he had wronged her—the story, to tell which he had come all the way from California, tramping most of the distance, penniless, foot-sore, and weary; he had come to ask her forgiveness before he died.

"He did me a great wrong," murmured Emily; "he betrayed the love I bore him, the trust I confided in him."

"He did you no wrong, Emily," said Alice, taking up the burden of the story at this point. "It is a week now since—since your father's death, and while waiting for you to recover from your death-like stupor, he told us all. Your secret marriage to him was no mere mockery; you need not blush to acknowledge your child; you are Vivian Grey's lawful wife. If he has led you to think otherwise, it was through a mistaken sense of honor; if he has condemned himself in your eyes, it was through your father's threats, for your sake."

"Ah, I have loved him so," murmured Emily; "I still love him, in spite of his cruel, cruel letter. Oh, if he could only blot that from my memory—if he could only be again what he was to me, my first, my only love, my heart's idol!"

"He can," exclaimed Tom, in a tone of deep emotion. "If you will only let me call him; if you will only listen to him."

Emily was too greatly agitated to reply in words. She nodded her head and pressed her child more closely to her breast.

Tom left the room for an instant, and then returned, leading Vivian Grey by the hand.

He was not now clad like a tramp, but his hollow cheeks and wan complexion showed how greatly he must have suffered, both physically and mentally, during the last six months.

He tremblingly advanced toward the bed, and, sinking on his knees before her, took up one of her thin, wasted hands, and, pressing it to his lips, brokenly exclaimed:

"Can you forgive me, Emily?"

She caressingly stroked his hair, and, with a faint smile, answered:

"They tell me I have nothing to forgive."

Then he told her all the reader already knows about the circumstances under which he had written the letter of his refusal to accept the money proffered to him, his disappearance from New York, how remorse for his action followed him everywhere, and finally drove him back to New York to reveal all to the wife he had so deeply injured, and whom he now loved with an intensity of passion which made him appear all the more detestable to himself.

He told her all this, and added that as, his money being gone, he was tramping along the railroad track near Inwood, he caught in his arms a babe which had been thrown out of a window of a passing train. He knew that he had saved the little one's life, though he had no suspicion that it was his own. It was a great consolation to him to feel that he had preserved a life even at the moment when he was meditating self-destruction. He determined to take it to Emily. He had a vague sort of idea that it would be a mediator to obtain his forgiveness, and, if she would adopt it, perhaps she would remember him by it when he was dead.

"When I learned that it was my own child whose life I had saved," he concluded, taking the babe in his arms and pressing it to his heart, "I began to hope that Heaven had interceded in my behalf, and would restore your love to me. Tell me, Emily, I implore you, that my hope is not in vain."

"My child, my husband!" exclaimed Emily, half rising in her bed, and folding both of them in a long, impassioned embrace.

Reader, what more have we to tell? During the week which had elapsed since John Baxter's fatal termination of a life deliberately devoted to crime, he had been quietly interred in a nameless grave. Mrs. Brown, alias Mrs. Rauleigh, alias the "Magnetic Physician," had been captured and consigned to a cell in the Tombs to await trial for the manifold crimes brought home to her. A bright and happy future awaits those whom Tom Brewster loves, and the objects of his affection have, we hope, also gained a warm place in our reader's heart.

[THE END.]

Gentleman Joe, the Bonanza King; OR THE BELLE OF SILVER GULCH.

By JOS. E. BADGER, Jr.

CHAPTER I.

A BIBULOUS TOLL-TAKER.

"Evenin', ma'am, an' hopin' I see ye! Shorely 'tan't a shy an' a skeer you're takin' at Woolly Wilson? An' him so full o' the milk o' human kindness that he don't sca'cely dast to take a joggly step fer fear o' chokin' up 'ith butter?"

"Wild-and-woolly," this particular Wilson had been dubbed, and, as a general thing, he took pride in living up to that lawless standard; but it was no part of his present plans to give premature fright to the young lady, who had slackened her pace on noting his presence on the bridge which spanned Roaring Fork, and over which she must pass in order to reach home.

He was almost a giant in height and in bulk, clad in flannel shirt, copper-riveted trousers of heavy brown duck, and knee-boots of coarse cowhide. About his middle was buckled a belt, thickly studded with cartridges, and supporting a knife and a brace of heavy revolvers.

A maudlin grin spread over his whisky-inflamed features, and as he jerked off his time-worn felt hat to perfect his clumsy bow, the faint breeze set his fire-red hair to fluttering in time with his bristling beard.

Miss Sybil Ritchie's hesitation lasted barely long enough to be noticed by that bibulous colossus. She was not a young lady given to magnifying each mole-hill into a mountain, and while she could not recall that particular specimen, fate had thrown her into contact with many "rough diamonds."

True, few among them all had offered such an unpromising exterior as this, but even should Woolly Wilson be as evil as he looked, surely she had naught to fear from him in broad daylight, and so near to the bluff, honest friends who had gallantly dubbed her "Belle of Silver Gulch."

With that thought tinging her smooth cheeks with color, and lending her dark eyes a prouder gleam, Miss Ritchie stepped upon the bridge and attempted to pass the stranger by with a slight bow in recognition of his address.

Not until the young lady was nearly opposite, did Wilson change his attitude, but then he lurched forward, one arm barring the way as his other hand clapped his hat upon his head, an ugly chuckle parting his chapped lips.

"Whoa-up, Emma! You're mighty good-lookin', but ye cain't bu'st the rules an' reg'lations made an' pervided fer—whoa-up, pritty!"

The maiden recoiled, her face paling, but not from fear alone.

"Let me pass, sir," she said, a little sharply. "You have no right to stop me. I am going home, and if you dare——"

"Dare's my name, an' Do-it's my natur', honey-bird," interposed the rascal, brushing the back of a hand across his bearded lips. "I've jest bin p'inted keeper o' this yer bridge, an' you're my fust huckleberry. Mebbe they han't so mighty much money into it, but I do reckon they's plenty sweetness fer to make up the odds. So—pay the toll, pritty-all-over! Pay the toll, an' then give thanks you're one o' the sex as kin pay, yit be richer then when ye fust begun."

Sybil Ritchie was anything but pale, now. Woolly Wilson had made his meaning only too clear, and as his hairy paws reached out to wrap her little figure in a loving embrace, she struck them down with a force which changed that maudlin grin to a scowl of growing anger.

"You brute!" she panted, recoiling still farther, yet too

proud to turn in actual flight. "How dare you insult me?"

"Sultin' of ye? Me? Wild-and-Woolly Wilson?"

"Let me pass, sir, or I'll have you punished for—Stop!"

Sybil tried to spring past the ruffian, but he was not too drunk to foil that effort, and one red arm swept around her waist, a coarse chuckle bubbling through his thick lips.

"No, ye don't, ducky darlint! Cain't jump over the toll-bar long's your uncle—"

With a panting cry of indignant rage, the maiden clinched her little fist and struck him squarely in the face with all the force she could summon; and that was no trifle, girl though she was.

That hairy head flew back with a jerk, and Wilson lost his grasp for the moment. Sybil sprang forward to escape, but the ending was not to come thus.

Surprise, not pain, had caused that recoil, and instantly rallying, Woolly Wilson sprang after his fleeing prize, catching her before she could win clear of the bridge, laughing harshly as he restrained her struggles, one arm compassing her waist, his other forcing both wrists together and holding her helpless.

His blood-shot eyes glowed wickedly as they peered into hers, and his whisky-laden breath fanned her paling cheek, as he growled forth:

"Think ye did when ye didn't, don't ye? Try to jump the bar an' give the toll taker the dirty shake, will ye?"

"Let me go! Release me, I say, or—"

"Stiddy, my dainty little heifer! Quit yer kickin' an' lis'en to the law an' gospel as writ down by Woolly Wilson. What does the law say? Ef a critter tries to cheat, make 'em pay double over! An' so—stiddy them lips, my posey! I was jest a-funnin' at fust, but now—hyar I come fer the honey!"

Despite his greatly superior strength, Wilson found it no easy task to control his captive, even while caught at such sore disadvantage. Even Sybil Ritchie was too proud to cry aloud for help, but she fought against further insult as only a pure maiden can.

Still, there could have been but one ending had they been left to themselves, for the ruffian was growing more and more vicious as his worst passions came to the surface, and his brutal strength was more harshly exerted as Sybil's physical powers began to fail her.

Neither girl nor rascal caught the sound of swift foot-falls coming nearer the bridge, and that low, stern cry of hot rage passed unheard as a tall, athletic figure leaped over the low stone wall, which guarded the approach to the crossing.

"Miss Ritchie—you hound!"

"The devil!"

"Mr. Gentry—help!"

Woolly Wilson turned at that stern cry, and as he partially relaxed his grasp, Sybil uttered a tremulous, thankful gasp, for she saw rescue at hand.

One strong white hand caught the ruffian by the shaggy beard, jerking his head back to receive a blow that cut to the bone. The shock broke his grasp, and, as Sybil shrank tremblingly away, Wilson, reeling back toward the rude railing, tried to snatch a pistol from his belt, as he cursed horribly.

"I'll bloody murder ye fer that!" he snarled, but ere he could do or say more, the young man was upon him, his handsome face white as if carved from parian marble, his gray-blue eyes glittering like polished mirrors of steel.

"Go wash your mouth out, do!" cried Gentry, sternly, grasping the giant by leg and shoulders, heaving him over the railing, then hurling him headlong to the dark waters below.

It was all done with marvelous rapidity, and practiced hand though he might be with the gun, Wild-and-Woolly Wilson had no time in which to draw, much less make use of a weapon.

He gave a howling yell of angry terror, which was cut short by his loud splash into the river, there flowing deep and still, luckily for his bones, but no further attention was paid him by his conqueror just then.

The instant his grip left that evil carcass, Joseph Gen-

try turned toward Miss Ritchie, his strong face showing unusual agitation, as he asked:

"I hope—you're not injured, Sybil?"

The maiden shook her head, a wan smile coming into her pallid face, as her eyes met those of "Gentleman Joe." She was too deeply agitated for immediate speech, but she impulsively caught his arm, moving toward the end of the bridge, as though desirous only of escaping the scene.

Without glance or thought toward the discomfited toll-taker, Gentry yielded to her wishes, and a very few moments sufficed to carry them out of sight of the bridge, as they left the main road for a path which afforded a shorter route to the maiden's home, on the outskirts of Silver Gulch.

Presently Gentleman Joe explained how he had chanced to catch sight of Sybil and the ruffian on the bridge, and, of course, had lost no time in coming to the rescue.

"I would have shot the dog, out of hand, only I feared—I didn't dare risk a bullet so close to your precious life, Sybil," strong emotion unsteady his tones just then.

"He was drunk. He didn't mean—oh, Mr. Gentry, I tried so hard not to be frightened, but—"

"I know; I understand. If I could only have saved you from that, as I would like to save you from everything that is ugly and painful, and—"

Gentleman Joe cut himself short, like one who fears to give too free expression to his feelings. Sybil flashed a swift, shy glance upward from a corner of her eye, the rich color coming back to her cheek the while; but she asked no questions just then.

"You did save me, Mr. Gentry, from insult, at least. I only wish I could find words to thank you for it," she murmured, her tones far from steady, and a little shiver running through the hand that rested upon his strong arm.

"Don't, please. I'd rather you wouldn't even try to thank me—just now. There is yet a week to run before the day set for your final decision. If you can thank me then—"

Again Joseph Gentry left his sentence incomplete, but this time he was gazing ardently, imploringly upon that blushing, downcast face, mutely begging its owner to complete the speech for him. But Sybil said nothing, and her steps quickened a bit as though she was growing eager to end an interview, which was becoming embarrassing, if not painful.

Gentleman Joe bit his lip sharply, for he gave this haste an unfavorable interpretation, but her will was his law, and he made no effort to delay their progress.

"As for that fellow, Miss Ritchie, I'll take care that he never annoys you again. I'll look him up as I go back, and if he hasn't broken his neck in falling, maybe he'll be sobered off enough to comprehend a little lecture on good manners."

"You mean—oh, Mr. Gentry!" said Sybil, with a quick catch in her breath as her fingers closed upon his arm: "He might—if he should—please don't have any trouble with the brute!"

"Is it for his sake, or for mine, that you ask it, Sybil?" "For your sake, of course," but with drooping eyes that refused to meet his ardent gaze. "If harm came to you, through me, I'd never find forgiveness in this world."

Gentleman Joe made a quick movement with his arms, but it was to throw them behind his back, clasping his fingers tightly. A faint smile came into his face as Sybil gazed upward with a startled air, but his tones were almost cold, as he spoke:

"I am under bonds for a week longer. Miss Ritchie, but I never knew until now how hard it can be made for an honest man to keep his pledge. If Harry Tyson was with us now, I'd ask him to let you—"

The maiden shrank away a bit, her embarrassment deepening. She grasped at the first pretext which presented itself, saying:

"There's the house. You'll come in, Mr. Gentry? Mother will like to thank you for saving—for bringing me home."

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